Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____   _____

Carolyn Browning Helsel   Date

The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites
Preaching about Racism

By

Carolyn Browning Helsel
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
Person, Community, and Religious Life

_____
Thomas G. Long, Ph.D.
Advisor

_____
Elizabeth Bounds, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Emmanuel Y. Lartey, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites
Preaching about Racism

By

Carolyn Browning Helsel
Th.M., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2010
M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004
B.A.. Whitworth University, 2001

Advisor: Thomas G. Long, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In the Graduate Division of Religion
Person, Community and Religious Life
2014

Abstract

The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites
Preaching about Racism
By Carolyn Browning Helsel

This dissertation examines the lack of sermons about racism from white preachers in predominantly white congregations and suggests three possible sources of such reticence: an insufficient understanding of the manifestations of racism today, an inability to perceive the salience of white racial identity, and an inadequate theological framework for preaching about racism as sin. The commonality between all three insufficiencies is the role of interpretation in assessing the meaning of racism, white racial identity, and racism as sin. Thus, I argue that in order to preach about racism, white preachers need a revised interpretive framework that can encompass the cognitive apprehension of racism, the personal formation required to work towards an anti-racist white racial identity, and the theological sensitivity to the pervasiveness of racism. After describing theoretical resources to respond to these sources of reticence, I propose a Ricoeurian interpretive framework called the hermeneutics of recognition, drawing from the work of hermeneutic phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur, particularly in his last book, *The Course of Recognition*. The hermeneutics of recognition include a three-part analysis of recognition-identification, self-recognition, and mutual recognition, and this final phase of mutual recognition is rooted in an image of gift exchange. For whites preaching on racism, I argue that the hermeneutics of recognition involve recognizing the manifestations of racism, recognizing oneself as white, and then moving toward mutual recognition out of gratitude. This gratitude emerges from the white preacher's dual awareness of the intractable nature of racism as sin and the generosity of God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ. The three basic movements of the hermeneutics of recognition for whites preaching about racism are recognition-identification, recognition-personalization, and mutual recognition-gratitude. This dissertation argues that in order to overcome a reluctance to preach about racism, white preachers can employ an alternative interpretive framework, known as the hermeneutics of recognition, which includes acknowledging the difficulty of identifying racism, moving towards personal formation by recognizing the salience of one's white racial identity, and in preaching about racism out of the recognition that the depth of human sinfulness can only be redeemed by the gift of God that calls us to gratitude.

The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites
Preaching on Racism

By

Carolyn Browning Helsel
Th. M., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2010
M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004
B.A., Whitworth University, 2001

Advisor: Thomas G. Long, Ph.D.

Acknowledgements

This is a dissertation that ends in gratitude, and it is only right that it begins in gratitude. I am first of all deeply grateful for the kindness and support of my advisor, Tom Long. His mentoring has been a tremendous gift to me during my doctoral program at Emory. Working with him and helping him teach the Intro to Preaching course has been an honor and great privilege. The speed and efficiency with which I have been able to complete this dissertation can be attributed primarily to his willingness to work during his sabbatical, responding quickly to my chapters, and giving me confidence that this dissertation was ready to defend.

There are many other amazing faculty members who have also been a great support to me. Let me begin with the other two members of my committee, Liz Bounds and Emmanuel Lartey, who gave me sagely advice and demonstrated a careful reading of this work: thank you for the gift of your time! I also had the pleasure of taking doctoral seminars from each of them, Theories of Justice with Liz Bounds and Intercultural Pastoral Care with Emmanuel Lartey. I have learned so much from both of you!

There are many other professors at Emory whom I want to acknowledge. First, Teresa Fry Brown was a tremendous source of inspiration to me as a scholar, preacher woman, and mother, as I entered my program having recently given birth to my second child. Dr. Fry Brown validated for me the challenge it is to be "all things to all people," including being a mother to a newborn while starting course work. Her course on Women Preaching reminded me that there have been many women who have gone on before me in this journey. I want to thank all of the faculty with whom I had the great honor of working during my time at Emory, either as a teaching assistant or in a doctoral seminar. Luke Timothy Johnson was an amazing model for teaching and offered great feedback. Pam Hall's seminar on virtue ethics was a prime example of excellence in teaching that kept students engaged and personally inspired. Ellen Ott Marshall's course on Christian ethics taught me how to combine my interests in philosophical ethics and my

as examples of faithful and prophetic living. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for being such wonderful people and inspiring individuals! My siblings: Eloise Browning, Catherine Browning, Sarah Griffin, Helen Silantien, and Chris Browning, continue to be sources of encouragement and humility. Being fifth of six children has always reminded me that there are other ways of being gifted and contributing to the world. Thanks to each of you for being proud of me and your words of encouragement!

Finally, my heart fills with love and gratitude when I think of the support of my husband, Philip Browning Helsel, and our two children, Caleb and Evelyn: you are gifts of life, love, joy and delight. Phil, thank you for pursuing your Ph.D. and providing me an example of how to finish well, and thank you for celebrating my work even before I had finished most of my chapters. Caleb and Evelyn, thank you for being patient with me as I spent so much time on the computer when you wanted me to give you more attention. Evelyn's tearful plea, "I want Mommy to be done with her dissertation!" was very motivating. May each of you continue to follow your passions in life and use your many gifts in service to others. I also acknowledge the God of grace and love, whose call on my life has inspired me to follow my passion. I am deeply thankful for the sovereignty of God whose "power is made perfect in weakness" (1 Corinthians 12:9).

Contents:

Introduction

"…my polyphonic contextualism will be methodologically promiscuous."[1]

The purpose of this introduction is to explain the methodology and commitments that frame my project. These commitments are multifaceted, emerge out of my own social location, and have shaped my methodology. I am a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman, married to a man, mother to two children, an ordained Presbyterian (U.S.A.) minister of Word and Sacrament, a preacher, and a scholar. This dissertation is written for other white preachers and those who teach preaching to white seminarians. This social location has impacted my choice in audience, and this choice has in turn impacted the content of this dissertation and my methodology. This dissertation is about the hermeneutics of recognition for whites preaching about racism, a subject that incorporates discussions of race, racism, white racial identity, and theologies of sin. For the hermeneutic perspective, I have chosen to utilize a Ricoeurian framework for the hermeneutics of recognition. In the following paragraphs, I will describe my theoretical commitments as well as how my methodology brings together these subjects.

A basic commitment underlying my dissertation emerges from my religious faith tradition, having grown up in a mainline Protestant denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and nurtured in my faith during adolescence by evangelical para-church organizations including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Young Life. In the course of a conversation with my church's youth director, I experienced a call to ministry

---

[1] José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

at the age of fifteen. The particular vision I had of ministry was that of preaching in congregational settings. It was with this call in mind that I pursued my undergraduate education at an evangelical liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Whitworth University. While in college, I interned at a local church in youth ministry and volunteered in a children's hospital doing pastoral care, and these ministry experiences pointed me towards continued ministerial preparation by going to seminary upon graduation. My call to ministry also shapes my methodological commitments as a practical theologian, seen in this dissertation as the particular choice of a practical theological methodology, as well as in my selection of my target audience: white Christian preachers. Later in this introduction, I will explain the methodology of practical theology as described by Richard Osmer as an overarching framework for understanding the internal logic to this dissertation.

Once enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary, I became exposed to other ways of being Christian, even differences amongst Presbyterians, and it was due to this exposure that I began to question particular aspects of my faith tradition, including its patriarchal manifestations as I had experienced them in college. This experience led me to two other commitments that arise out of my social location: feminism and anti-racism. As a woman called to ministry, I experienced the internalized self-doubt resulting from being a *woman* called to ministry: individuals in college and within my network of friends and family had challenged my experience of being called because I was a woman, and their interpretation of Scripture was such that they thought God did not call women to ministry. These others expressed to me that God had a special calling reserved for women: that of mothering and serving God in other (non-leadership) roles in ministry.

For instance, it would be acceptable for me to be a children's pastor or a youth leader, but it would not be acceptable for me to pastor over a congregation or a group of men.

Discovering feminist theology in seminary helped me to interpret my experiences in a more liberating way, helping me aim my questioning and doubt not at myself or my experience of God's calling but instead at the larger system of injustice that devalued the contributions of women. I became more interested in the liberation of other women as well as others who experienced oppression in society. This commitment to liberation led me to discover my own privilege and complicity in other forms of oppression, particularly racism. Womanist theology and other contextualized theologies helped me re-interpret how I viewed the world and my place in it. I saw that I was part of a larger social system in which intersecting oppressions of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism, to name a few, overlapped to give me advantages in some areas and disadvantages in others.

Following seminary, I ministered in three contexts: first in a hospital setting on the U.S.-Mexico border, then in a mid-sized predominantly-white congregation in a large metropolitan suburban neighborhood in Texas, and finally as an admissions administrator in a denominationally-affiliated stand-alone seminary. These three different ministry contexts gave me experiences that supported the critical theory of feminism and anti-racism, giving evidence for the continued existence of systemic oppression in a variety of contexts, but also led me to question these theoretical foundations for their methodological usefulness in offering guidelines for practices of resistance. While these theoretical bases offered me analytical tools for recognizing the problematic power dynamics involved and the maintenance of unjust social hierarchies, I did not know how

to respond effectively from my own social position. How, as a woman, could I speak in church about sexism? How, as a white person, could I speak about racism among other whites? How, as someone with a middle-class background, talk about class amid a congregation of middle-, upper-, and working-class congregants? How, as a married, heterosexual woman, could I speak about heterosexism in contexts where issues of sexuality were generally taboo, and many people implicitly and explicitly disapproved of ordaining gays and lesbians? I returned to academic study in order to develop a practical theological approach for responding to systemic oppression from social positions at the intersections of privilege and disadvantage.

"Intersectionality" is a phrase coined by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw to depict the complexities of identity loyalty among women of color when faced with whether to side with white women against patriarchy or with men of color against racism.[2] Crenshaw pointed out that the multiple overlapping oppressions facing persons at the intersections of racism, sexism, and heterosexism among others, forced them to make difficult choices regarding how they engaged in political advocacy. Highlighting intersectionality brought attention within the academy to the necessity of including a broader matrix for analyzing political advocacy and the need for coalition-building with persons across group differences. The intersectionality of injustices not only calls attention to the need for a wider analysis for the diversity and variety of injustices, but it also complexifies the use of labels in advocating on behalf of oppressed groups. The intersectionality of oppressions means that persons are not in distinct groups of oppressor and oppressed; persons can be oppressed because of some aspect of their identity while

---

[2] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women," *Standford Law Review* 43 (July 1991): 1241–1299.

also being among the dominant group because of some other characteristic they share with those in dominance.

Yet while oppressions overlap and intersect for persons depending upon their social location, it is important to be able to analyze individual forms of oppression because each has its own historical development and localized manifestations. Thus, while I could have chosen to focus on other forms of oppression, this dissertation calls attention to the need for white preachers to preach about racism. The choice of racism as the focus over other forms of oppression involves not only the lack of space to address oppressions more broadly but also my social location as a white woman. Having resonated with the claims of feminist theology, I also felt convicted by the charges of Womanist theology regarding the universalizing of "women's experience" by white feminists.[3] While there are other oppressive systems in which I am complicit as being a member of the dominant group, such as heterosexism, classism, and ablebodism, I chose to focus on racism because of my social location as *white* in the context of a historically segregated faith tradition. Churches in the United States remained largely segregated based on race due to historical choices of denominations and individual congregations to exclude persons of color. While in many Christian congregations, there is a diversity of persons representing different levels of wealth and income and representing various degrees of ablebodiedness, and there may or may not be known diversity in sexual orientation, churches today remain significantly segregated in terms of race.[4] Because of

---

[3] Renita J. Weems, *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 55.

the history of racism in the United States and its relationship with Christianity in the development of racially segregated denominations and churches, I imagined preaching about racism in white churches would prove to be the most-easily observable. It would be easy to see whether white preachers addressed racism in their sermons to predominantly white congregations, discussing racism as part of their denominational or congregational history, or as an ongoing problem that their churches needed to address. Yet noting whether or not white preachers were preaching about racism did not offer me any solutions for how to help white preachers who were not preaching about racism to do so.

To understand the reasons behind white preachers' reticence to preach about racism, I drew from the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. Homiletician Sally Brown has articulated that hermeneutics is employed in the work of nearly all practical theologians, as either an epistemology or a methodology, and sometimes both.[5] Within this dissertation, I am drawing from hermeneutic theory as both an epistemology and methodology, using hermeneutics as a way of understanding the reluctance of whites to preach on racism, as well as offering a new hermeneutic framework to assist white preachers in this endeavor. Broadly speaking, phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that studies the meaning of human experience, a form of philosophy similar to but also different from existentialism. Phenomenology studies how persons perceive reality around them, attempting to clarify how these perceptions come about, without providing

---

[4] For figures on church segregation, see Michael O Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[5] Sally A. Brown, "Hermeneutical Theory," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 112.

a causal explanation for the existence of such perceptions.[6] While some of the earliest

philosophers of phenomenology such as Edmund Husserl and his student Martin

Heidegger advanced an "eidetic" approach, focusing on the object of perception, later

philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur emphasized the interpretive process inherent to

perception.[7] Richard Kearney explains Ricoeur's view that hermeneutics provides the

foundation for phenomenology, because

> [I]ntuition is always a matter of interpretation. This implies that things are always
> given to us *indirectly* through a detour of signs; but it does not entail an
> embracing of existential irrationalism. The interpretation (*hermeneia*) of indirect
> or tacit meaning invites us to think *more,* not to abandon speculative thought
> altogether.[8]

Kearney cites Ricoeur's definition of hermeneutics as "the art of deciphering *indirect*

meaning."[9] Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology does not assume that we can

approach meaning directly, but rather can be more successful through "detours" that

bring us into conversation with social sciences in order to help illuminate the objects of

analysis.

Deciphering the *indirect* meaning of "race" as a concept involves looking at the

context in which "race" develops as a social construct.[10] For whites, understanding race

---

[6] Crowell, "Husserlian Phenomenology," in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*,
ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 10.

[7] Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 1–14.

[8] Ibid., 2.

[9] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, Routledge Classics
(London: Routledge, 2003), 374; cited in Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 1.

[10] Here and throughout this dissertation, "race" refers not to a set of biological similarities but
rather to socially-constructed categories used for the stratification of society. While race has no meaning
biologically—there is only *one* human race—"race" as a category continues to have meaning socially,

involves not only conceptual analysis, but also psychological awareness. For many whites, to speak of race means to speak about racism, and while there are differences in what is understood by the term "racism," "[f]or some people, the term is synonymous with 'White people.'"[11] To talk about "race," brings up the subject of "racism," which many people directly associate with white people. Persons who are identified as white in society, and who interpret racism in this way, think not only about the word racism as a concept but as a judgment on their complicity within racism because they are white. This dissertation employs hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology for understanding the process of white preachers' interpretation of "racism" and coming to perceive themselves as "white." Drawing from the work of developmental psychologists, I suggest in chapter three that there are ways for whites to move beyond feelings of guilt and shame regarding their whiteness, instead experiencing a sense of pride in being part of a long tradition of whites who have worked against racial injustice.

At the same time, though this dissertation has focused on "race" as a distinct category for analysis, I understand that race is inevitably connected to other forms of categorizations as well. In the words of Priya Kandaswamy: "the irreducibility of race should not be taken to mean that race develops in isolation from other categories of difference. Rather, race must both be seen as an important entity in its own right but also as fundamentally inseparable from the gendered, sexualized, and classed contexts in

---

materially, and psychologically because of how society continues to attribute meaning and character assessments based on perceptions of others' race. This social stratification based on race that benefits whites to the disadvantage of others is how I will define "racism" in chapter two, drawing from the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant as well as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.

[11] Benjamin P Bowser, ed., *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1995), x.

which ideas of race and racial categories develop."[12] Because of this inseparability, I draw from the methodology of ethnography in providing a "thick description" of the types of experiences whites may have depending on their social categorizations. In particular, I focus on issues of class when describing white racial identity in chapter three. The influence of class on experiences of whiteness serves to challenge a homogenous positionality of "whites," and I use this ethnography to support a view of white racial identity as a hermeneutic horizon, or as a place from which whites interpret the world. This perspectival location varies depending on other factors which limit one's access to privilege, but consistently the category of "whiteness" serves to limit what whites can perceive from their social location because of the history of racism in the United States.

Bringing together the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology and ethnography with critical theory of race and psychological theory of racial identity development, seems a bit "methodologically promiscuous," using the phrase of José Medina quoted at the beginning of this Introduction. Yet these theories together help me pursue the larger goal of the four tasks of practical theology in addressing my topic. The practical theological method of Richard Osmer shapes this dissertation in a fundamental way by providing the overarching justification for my combination of methods and theories.[13] Osmer examines the four tasks of the practical theologian as being 1) descriptive-empirical; 2) interpretive; 3) normative; and 4) pragmatic. These four tasks

---

[12] Priya Kandaswamy, "Gendering Racial Formation," in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Daniel HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 27.

[13] Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008).

are intricately interrelated, with problems needing to be researched arising out of the

pragmatic tasks of ministry, or theory arising out of the descriptive-empirical task

pointing towards a normative stance of what should be done, as so on. These four tasks

arise out of the necessarily-interdisciplinary nature of practical theology as a discipline.

Osmer associates these four tasks with the three-fold office of Jesus Christ as priest, king,

and prophet. The priestly role is exemplified in the careful listening of the empirical task,

in which an attention to the congregation is offered as a form of priestly presence, noting

the uniqueness of what is going on in this particular situation.[14] The second task of

interpretation involves the awareness that all of life is a matter of interpretation, and that

it is important in leadership for wisdom to guide interpretation, a wisdom as exemplified

in the kingly role of Christ.[15] The third task is normative, a calling out of what could be

different and what needs to change, a proclamation typical of the prophetic voice as seen

in Jesus' prophetic challenges to his hearers.[16] The four task is pragmatic and seeks to

bring these other tasks to bear on the practice of ministry.[17]

      Within this dissertation, chapter one addresses the descriptive-empirical task,

which involves examining the dearth of sermons on racism by white preachers. The first

chapter moves towards the interpretive task by arguing that this lack of preaching on

racism can be linked to the larger social context of conflicting interpretive frameworks

for understanding race and racism in the United States today. The interpretive task is

further addressed in chapters two and three, which focus on interpretive constructs of

---

[14] Ibid., 34–41.

[15] Ibid., 21.

[16] Ibid., 132–139.

[17] For examples, see Osmer's work in chapter four. Ibid., 175–218.

racism and white racial identity. Each of these chapters seeks to link the lack of preaching on racism with the difficulty of understanding what "racism" or "whiteness" means today. From these various theories used to depict the conflicting interpretations of racism and whiteness, I suggest at the end of each chapter a particular way of understanding racism and whiteness that may serve the white preacher in addressing racism. But these suggestions do not complete the methodology of the practical theologian, since the theological commitments of the practical theologian require reference to one's faith tradition as an ultimate interpretive guide. In chapter four, I turn to theologies of sin that help shed light on *why* it is difficult for white preachers to adequately address racism from the pulpit. I employ the theological analysis of Stephen Ray to demonstrate that even in attempting to discuss racism as sin from the pulpit, white preachers may be "sinning in their sin-talk," which means that they are prone to further inscribe racist patterns of speech in how they depict the problem of racism. Additionally, the theologies of sin of George Kelsey, M. Shawn Copeland, and J. Kameron Carter, help explain in theological language how the intractable nature of racism prevents it from being eradicated by human efforts alone. These theologies of sin reveal the difficulty of interpreting racism and whiteness, and they point to the need for preaching that can help illuminate human reliance upon God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. The fifth chapter begins to address the pragmatic task of practical theology, by discussing the hermeneutic phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition*. This hermeneutic understanding of recognition helps provide a framework for the white preacher wanting to preach about racism, and in the sixth chapter I suggest ways that Ricoeur's

hermeneutic of recognition can be used in tandem with the theories discussed in earlier chapters to help white preachers preach about racism.

Finally, I need to say a word about two other commitments that shape this dissertation, drawing from the work of José Medina. Medina's book's *The Epistemology of Resistance* describes several commitments within his methodology that I also share, particularly nonideal theory and meliorism. First, let me expound upon his commitment to "nonideal theory." Medina writes,

> [N]onideal theory is founded on a commitment to *empiricism and fallibilism,* to the test of experience and the conditionality upon future experiential tests. On this theoretical model, there is never final and absolute proof of the correctness of our norms, for our norms can only be backed up by how they impact the actual experiences of those affected by them.[18]

The phrase "nonideal theory" is to distinguish itself from theories that are universalizing in tone and tend to minimize individual differences. Nonideal theory is committed to empiricism, which involves continuing the hermeneutic arc or praxis of returning again and again to the lived experience of those whose are most impacted by these theories and seeing how such theories impact these persons. Nonideal theory is fallibilistic, meaning it is open to critique and in fact looks for the perspectives of others who will challenge its perspective. The "nonideal" theory offered in this dissertation as a response to white preachers' reticence to preach about racism rests on future experiences of how this hermeneutic of recognition actually "works." While I offer at the end of chapter six an example of how it helped me to craft a sermon on racism, further study is needed to see if this theory can and does actually help white preachers preach about racism.

---

[18] Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 12.

This "nonidealism" does not reject ideals completely, however; it is not relativistic but rather stakes its claims tentatively. Medina's work certainly includes ideals, and my dissertation also aims towards certain ideals, such as the gift exchange depicted in chapters five and six. Within a framework of nonideal theory, Medina expresses ideals as being "conceived differently: not as ahistorical standards of assessment for any society, but as imagined solutions for particular problems, or as hypotheses."[19] Likewise, I offer a hypothesis for an imagined solution: the hermeneutics of recognition rooted in the gift exchange may help white preachers address racism in their sermons to white congregations.

This relates to the commitment of "meliorism," which Medina defines as "making things better without being shackled to any particular picture of the best."[20] This dissertation suggests a hermeneutics for white preachers to preach about racism, not knowing exactly what the hoped-for goal would look like once white congregations begin hearing more sermons on racism. This dissertation does not go the route of arguing for the vision of a just society that would best demonstrate the success of such sermons on racism. Instead, it proposes a way to "make things better" by opening up the conversation, getting white congregations to talk about how racism continues to shape our society. This "meliorism" is modest: I do not suppose that white preachers can in fact be successful at alighting the consciences of their congregation. My attempt at making things better is to end the silence, to provide the modicum of courage and direction that is needed to begin to think and interpret Scripture with the perspective that race continues to

---

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

shape our culture and society. It is my hope that equipping white preachers to begin the

conversation about racism will lead to further engagement with and commitment to

justice within society as a whole. I hope that white preachers will do more than attempt to

cultivate a more racially diverse congregation—this is not necessarily the image of an

anti-racist congregation, as seen in the work of Korie Edwards.[21] Racially diverse

congregations can still perpetuate the power divisions present in society at large, and

white congregants' attempts at welcoming persons of color into their congregation can

perpetuate racist stereotypes.[22] My attempt at meliorating the current situation of white

preachers' silence surrounding racism is to help them understand a process through which

they may begin "hearing [themselves] into speech."[23] As a practical theologian, more

specifically, I hope that white preachers can open themselves to the redeeming power of

God in Jesus Christ to save us from the sin of racism, and to help us "work out our

salvation" (Philippians 2:12) as people of God called to "do justice, love kindness, and

walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

---

[21] Korie L. Edwards, "Much Ado About Nothing? Rethinking the Efficacy of Multiracial Churches for Racial Reconciliation," in *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith*, ed. J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 231–254.

[22] Traci C West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

[23] Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 127–128.

Chapter 1

White Noise: Obstacles to White Preachers' Preaching on Racism

"The nation has not yet found peace from its sins."[1]

"Discussion of God's working through individuals, organizations or institutions to promote and make systemic changes that bring about racial justice is very limited if at all."[2]

A Conspicuous Absence of Sermons on Racism

The year 2013 marked the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.[3] On the day in January 2013 known as Martin Luther King Day, President Barack Obama was inaugurated into his second term as president, the first African American to hold the nation's highest office. The Sunday just prior to MLK day, January 20, 2013, churches all over the country could have had the opportunity to think about race through the sermons of their preachers. But how many *white* preachers actually used this opportunity to call attention to the remaining significance of race? A sampling of sermons from predominantly-white churches from a wide variety of denominations suggests that very few (one in my sampling of fifty from across the country and across denominations)

---

[1] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 7.

[2] Edwards, "Much Ado About Nothing? Rethinking the Efficacy of Multiracial Churches for Racial Reconciliation," 232.

[3] The Emancipation Proclamation, initially issued by Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862, was made official on January 1, 1863. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom took place August 28, 1963.

made reference to race in that Sunday morning's sermon.[4] Perhaps little can be deduced

from one Sunday, but having looked over the sermons of one of the most socially-

progressive[5] churches in the Southern United States, I found that in the course of two

years, race or racism was mentioned only four times, and none of these sermons explored

in depth racial inequality or ongoing racism or how congregants can challenge racism in

their own environments. In the sermons that mentioned racism, racism is mentioned only

in passing and grouped together with other societal ills, without reflecting on what it

means to be white in today's society or how the congregation might be implicated in

racism.[6] Based on this initial research, it appears that even in socially-progressive

churches, racism is not a subject frequently addressed in sermons of white preachers

within predominantly white congregations.

The fact that most white churches remain almost exclusively white in terms of

congregational membership is in itself problematic, recalling the words of Martin Luther

King, Jr. that "at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing 'In Christ

there is no East or West,' we stand in the most segregated hour in America."[7] The

---

[4] This study involved reading sermons from fifty different churches with white preachers whose sermons were available on their churches' websites in downloadable form. Each sermon was read with the intent of finding some mention of race, even a mention of Martin Luther King, Jr.. Only ten white preachers mentioned King, but of those ten only one made mention of continued racism. No other sermon mentioned racism even tangentially. For a complete description of the methodology of this sampling, see the Appendix.

[5] By "socially-progressive," I refer to churches who have been advocates for political and ecclesiastical change, an example of which is the full-inclusion and equal rights of LGBTQ persons in civil society and in ecclesiastical governance.

[6] For this study, I read through the archives of one socially-progressive church, known for its progressive political stance in advocating for LGBTQ rights, looking at every sermon over a two-year period. The results were that the terms "race" or "racism" appeared only in four sermons, and in these sermons were referred to only in passing and not the primary focus of the sermon.

existence of segregated churches results from a long history of racist discrimination, with

the formation of churches and denominations based primarily on race.[8] Though uniracial

churches for racial minorities have been supported on the basis of the continued need for

refuge from the continued discrimination in society and in white churches, white

churches do not offer the same benign benefit to its members.[9] In fact, interviews with

white Christians attending predominantly white congregations have revealed that they do

not view racism as a cause of the remaining inequality between whites and persons of

color in modern society.[10] At the same time, some argue that multicultural churches have

the potential of changing whites' racial attitudes, an argument that goes back to Gordon

Allport's 1958 "contact hypothesis," that the more interracial contact whites had with

persons who were different from themselves the less likely they were to have racist

beliefs, an argument used to support the desegregation of public schools.[11] A study of a

---

[7] Martin Luther King, Jr., preaching at National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. on March 31, 1968, quoted in Joseph Barndt, *Becoming the Anti-Racist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 1.

[8] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

[9] Ibid.; Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). The authors examine the continued needs of groups such as African American and Native Americans to have churches where they can find refuge from the discrimination they face during the week. For other communities such as Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, the need for separate churches arises also out of challenges to assimilation and the threat to the loss of culture following immigration.

[10] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*; George Yancey, "Racial Attitudes: Difference in Racial Attitudes of People Attending Multiracial and Uniracial Congregations," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 12 (2001): 185–206; George Yancey, "An Examination of Effects of Residential and Church Integration upon Racial Attitudes of Whites," *Sociological Perspectives* 42, no. 2 (1999): 279–304.

[11] DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*. Though the authors discuss the validity of uniracial churches for racial minorities, they nonetheless argue in support of multi-racial congregations as an answer to racism. ; Yancey, "Racial Attitudes"; See critiques of the contact hypothesis in Eileen O'Brien and Kathleen Odell Korgen, "It's the Message, Not the Messenger: The Declining Significance of Black-White Contact in a 'Colorblind' Society," *Sociological Inquiry* 77, no. 3 (August 2007): 356–382; Citing Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1958).

multi-racial congregation examined the continued dominance of whites within the congregation even when their percentage of overall membership declined to the point of being a minority within the church.[12]

White churches remain largely segregated, and yet white preachers have seemingly avoided the question of how race continues to impact society or their congregation. Thus, the following questions emerge out of these initial observations: what is the source of white preachers' reluctance to preach on racism, and what can be done to overcome this reticence in order for white preachers to preach about race and racism effectively?

Sources of White Preachers' Reticence

In terms of naming the reticence of white preachers, a few possible hypotheses emerge. Perhaps white preachers are reluctant to preach about race because they do not think "racism"--as they understand it--continues to be a significant problem, assuming signs like Obama's successful election and re-election as the first African American to the presidency demonstrate the end of racism.[13] Another possible source of reticence could be that white preachers lack the ability to understand the salience of their white racial identity[14], and are unable to effectively negotiate what it means to be white within a

---

[12] Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[13] For work that has been addressed to this assumption, see Michael Tesler and David O. Sears, *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[14] By "racial identity" I mean the self-conscious significance one gives to one's designated race, as well as the feelings and attitudes one has towards others in one's racial grouping.

current context of racial inequality and tension.[15] Yet a third possibility is that white

preachers do not see racism as a theological problem impacting the lives of their

predominantly white parishioners, so it is not something that they use to analyze the

spiritual needs of their congregation.[16] The fourth hypothesis is that white preachers may

indeed have a more nuanced understanding of racism, they may have become aware of

the significance of being white in today's changing racial climate and remaining racial

inequality, and yet they may simply not have the homiletical tools for translating this

awareness into effective sermons. This final hypothesis can be addressed by proposing a

homiletical method, but such a method would have to presuppose that the white preacher

has attended to the first three hypothetical sources of reticence. Overcoming a reticence

to preach about racism may involve all of these things and more, and undoubtedly there

are other reasons white preachers have for their reticence.[17] The process of becoming the

kind of preacher who can address this subject from the pulpit effectively involves not just

a cognitive adjustment, then, but rather a personal and spiritual transformation on

multiple levels, a transformation that impacts how one interprets the world one lives in,

oneself, and how God has called individuals and society to live. Changes to how one

interprets these aspects of one's life can be called a series of hermeneutic changes. The

goal of this dissertation is to try and address these hypothetical obstacles, culminating in

---

[15] Korie Edwards documents her research with congregants from a multi-racial congregation, in which white participants were much less likely to identify themselves by their race than their fellow congregants of color. See Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, 84–87.

[16] See the converse of this depicted in a study on the impacts of integrated worship communities on race consciousness among its white members, Yancey, "An Examination."

[17] Emerson and Smith note that a reader of an earlier draft of their work commented "It sounds like you are picking on whites." The sense of being "picked on" may serve as yet another source of reticence for talking about racism with whites. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 190, n.25.

the hermeneutics of recognition which I argue can help white preachers to interpret the subtle yet salient significance of race today in order to preach effectively on racism in white congregations.

Attending to the Reticence: The Changing Meaning of Racism

Rather than beginning with a crisp definition of racism, this dissertation argues that one of the sources of white preachers' reticence is that the meaning of racism has changed over time, that there remains a conflict of meanings within popular culture, and that white preachers, like the rest of the white population, may not all agree on what is understood by the term "racism."[18] Acknowledging this ambiguity and yet maintaining the salience of racial categories in continued inequality is crucial to engaging white preachers in the task of preaching on racism. In other words, to overcome the reticence caused by an outdated definition of racism, it is important not only to supply white preachers with a new definitional core, but also to understand the changing nature of that definition as an issue of hermeneutics and to provide white preachers with a way of interpreting the changing society around them.

The work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant describes a process of racial formation, in which the meaning of race and racism is constantly changing and politically contested. They argue:

---

[18] Throughout this dissertation, "race" will refer to the socially-constructed categorization of persons into separate groups based on skin color, and I will argue for an understanding of "racism" as a racialized social structure that benefits whites to the disadvantage of others. However, my main point here is that simply stating these definitions does not necessarily lead to general agreement. One of the problems for whites preaching about racism, I argue, is that there is a lack of consensus regarding what these terms mean in society. Recognizing this difficulty and the possibility of mis-recognition will be part of the "hermeneutics of recognition" that I will discuss in chapter six.

> Racial theory is shaped by actually existing race relations in any given historical period. Within any given historical period, a particular racial theory is dominant—despite often high levels of contestation. The dominant racial theory provides society with 'common sense' about race, and with categories for the identification of individuals and groups in racial terms. Challenges to the dominant racial theory emerge when it fails adequately to explain the changing nature of race relations, or when the racial policies it prescribes are challenged by political movements seeking a different arrangement.[19]

That is, racial theory is not ubiquitously accepted across time and place. "Race" as a categorical marker has itself shifted across history.[20] Race is not a biological marker, but rather one that is socially constructed, based on selecting certain bodily features to determine one's racial category as a function of social stratification. The grouping together of persons into "races" is a way of categorizing people that has historically been used for the social domination of one group—whites—over all others. But who has counted as "white" has shifted over time. For instance, Syrians in the early twentieth century argued successfully in court to be allowed citizenship on the basis of being "white," and since the 1960's Arabs and other persons from the Middle East have been listed as "white" on the U.S. Census, though following September 11 this same group became the object of intense racial profiling.[21] This shift in treatment from being undifferentiatedly "white" to becoming a target for racial profiling demonstrates Omi and Winant's definition of race as "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings

---

[19] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

[20] See, for example David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised (New York, London: Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[21] Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes From and What It Means for Politics* (Pluto Press, 2006); Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (July 1, 2001): 29–58; Salah Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State," *Middle East Report* 32, no. 224 (Fall 2002).

constantly being transformed by political struggle. …*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*. …[where] selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial stratification is always and necessarily a social and historical process."[22]

Another example of this is seen in the US Census changes in categorizing "Hispanic," moving after 1970 to consider Hispanic origin as an ethnicity and not a racial category.[23] Though persons on the US Census in 1990 and in 2000 could identify themselves as white and Hispanic or black and Hispanic, for purposes of investigation, the group of "non-white Hispanics" has continued to be seen as its own racial category.[24] This is seen in the research done on wealth disparity, in which the net worth of white families is compared to that of black or Hispanic families.[25] Persons from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and a number of other Spanish-speaking countries are at times lumped together as "Hispanic" and at other times differentiated into separate racial categories.

If race and the racial stratification that goes along with race are historically contextual and shifting, a static definition of race and racism may not adequately explain current social dynamics. For instance, the oft-cited definition of racism as "racial

---

[22] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55, emphasis in original.

[23] Sharon M. Lee, "Racial Classifications in the US Census: 1890-1990," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 1993): 75–94; Kenneth Prewitt, "Racial Classification in America: Where Do We Go from Here?," *Daedalus* 134, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 5–17.

[24] There is discussion of returning to pre-1977 categorization of Hispanic origin as a racial category and no longer as ethnicity. See "Census Rethinks Hispanic on Questionnaire," accessed December 30, 2013, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/01/03/hispanics-may-be-added-to-census-race-category/1808087/.

[25] Rakesh Kochkar, Richard Fry, and Paul Taylor, "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics," *Pew Social & Demographic Trends*, July 26, 2011, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/.

prejudice plus power"[26] does not account for the subtle exchanges of power in personal

interactions or the shifting nature of prejudice.[27] If "whites" are categorically in the

position of power, it is difficult to analyze situations of injustice against Jews, poor

whites, non-heterosexual whites or whites with disabilities.[28] Persons in society are

stratified based on a number of status markers, so speaking about "race" and "racism" as

the primary way of analyzing social discrimination can seem too essentialist a category to

offer any explanatory meaning regarding social stratification today.

The Continuing Significance of Race and the Role of Interpretation

At the same time, scholars of racial theory highlight the central role of whiteness

in the creation and perpetuation of racism in the United States.[29] To stake this claim is to

identify whites as those who benefit from the racial stratification as it currently stands.

Yet this creates a source of conflict for those whites whose interpretation of society views

themselves--as whites--as those who are disadvantaged racially today. Despite statistics

---

[26] Mark Chesler, "Contemporary Sociological Theories of Racism," in *Towards the Elimination of Racism* (New York: Pergamon, 1976); cited by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, Third Edition (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 26.

[27] For discussion on the exchange of power through the linguistic marketplace, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 37; For an anectdote about how quickly rage over one injustice fuels another act of injustice based on other axes of social hierarchy, see Patricia J Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: Noonday Press, 1998), 32.

[28] For an analysis of anti-racism and its tendency to ignore classism, see John Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Maurianne Adams et al., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2000); For a theological approach connecting issues of race with sexuality, see Patrick S. Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2013).

[29] Ashley W. Doane, "Rethinking Whiteness Studies," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1–18.

highlighting racial inequality in terms of wealth, health, and employment that favor

whites' advantage,[30] whites are reporting they feel they are the new targets of

discrimination.[31] Researchers are finding that whites are feeling a rise in "anti-white

bias," that they are among the targets of discrimination, feeling that "racism is a zero-sum

game that whites are now losing."[32] This sentiment is expressed in the rise of court cases

challenging affirmative action in university admissions, where white applicants feel they

have been unjustly discriminated against because they are white.[33]

　　While racial discrimination is outlawed, there are ways in which laws continue to

enable such discrimination to take place. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim

Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, has argued that the harsh drug

laws of the 1980's "war on drugs" has resulted in the mass incarceration of men of color,

prison sentences and felony convictions which have justified the same kind of

discrimination allowed legally under Jim Crow: housing discrimination, job

discrimination, and the inability to vote.[34] Alexander comments on the irony of the

---

[30] Pew Research Center released in 2011 statistics showing the net worth of white families as twenty times that of black families. Kochkar, Fry, and Taylor, "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics"; Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997); Mark D. Hayward and Melonie Heron, "Racial Inequality in Active Life among Adult Americans," *Demography* 36, no. 1 (February 1, 1999): 77–91; Bruce Western and Becky Pettit, "Black-White Wage Inequality, Employment Rates, and Incarceration," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 2 (September 1, 2005): 553–578.

[31] Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," *Perspectives on Pscyhological Science* 6, no. 3 (May 2011): 215–218.

[32] Ibid.

[33] See the most recent anti-affirmative action case, Fisher v. University of Texas from October 2012, which the Court ultimately failed to rule on, returning the case back to the Court of Appeals.

[34] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Reprint (New York: New Press, 2010).

prevalence of this discrimination during a time when the United States has just elected its first African American President. She writes of this juxtaposition describing an incident after leaving an election party celebrating Barack Obama's success:

> Yet when I walked out of the election night party, full of hope and enthusiasm, I was immediately reminded of the harsh realities of the New Jim Crow. A black man was on his knees in the gutter, hands cuffed behind his back, as several police officers stood around him talking, joking, and ignoring his human existence. People poured out of the building; many stared for a moment at the black man cowering in the street, and then averted their gaze. What did the election of Barack Obama mean for him? [35]

One of several recent cases that prompted heated discussions on racial discrimination was the shooting of black teenager Trayvon Martin.[36] On February 26, 2012, Martin was shot after being followed for looking "suspicious" and "up to no good," as recorded by the 911 call made by the shooter, George Zimmerman.[37] The case stirred up national uproar over the racism of racial profiling, exemplified in Zimmerman's interpretation of unarmed Martin as automatically "suspicious" because he was African American. On July 14, 2013, a jury of six women, all but one of whom was white, declared that George Zimmerman was "not guilty."

The acquittal came as a result of Zimmerman's defense successfully presenting the case that Trayvon Martin, though not armed with a gun, was imminently dangerous to Zimmerman. The defense's arguments insisted that race was not a factor, and that

---

[35] Ibid., 2–3.

[36] Other cases include the twenty-year sentencing in May 2012 of Marissa Alexander for shooting a warning shot that injured no one, and the deaths of Jonathan Ferrell in September 2013 and Renisha McBride in November 2013, who were each shot outside a home when seeking help after car accidents.

[37] "911 Calls Released in Trayvon Martin Fatal Shooting," *CBS News*, March 19, 2012, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57399800-504083/911-calls-released-in-trayvon-martin-fatal-shooting/.

Zimmerman's actions were motivated purely by self-defense. The success of these arguments can be seen in the opinion of the juror identified as "B37," who stated in an interview two days after the verdict: "I don't think race had anything to do with this trial."[38] For this juror, race was not a factor in this trial, but Martin's own actions did factor into his own death: "I believe he [Martin] played a *huge* role in his death. …When George confronted him he could have walked away and gone home. He didn't have to do whatever he did and come back and be in a fight."[39] Zimmerman's defense team convinced this juror and the rest of the six-person jury that though unarmed, Martin was a threat, and that the reality of this threat justified Zimmerman's use of force in fatally shooting Martin.

Zimmerman's defense succeeded in convincing the jury of this interpretation of the events surrounding Martin's death, that an unarmed teenager could be seen as a threat to the young man who was following him with a gun. This interpretation is only possible through the concomitant opinion expressed both by the defense and juror B37: that race had nothing to do with it. If the prosecution had succeeded in presenting race as directly related to Zimmerman's assumption that Martin was "suspicious," the jury instead would have to assume that this shooting was influenced less by self-defense and more by racism.

---

[38] "George Zimmerman Was 'Justified' in Shooting Trayvon Martin, Juror Says," *CNN*, accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/16/us/zimmerman-juror/index.html.

[39] "4 Zimmerman Trial Jurors Distance Themselves from Juror B37," *CBS News*, accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57594076/4-zimmerman-trial-jurors-distance-themselves-from-juror-b37/.

According to Vincent Southerland, senior counsel for NAACP Legal Defense Fund, "Race was clearly the centerpiece of the case. … It was the reason for the encounter [between Zimmerman and Martin] in the first place and it's the reason Zimmerman thought [Martin] was a criminal from the moment he laid eyes on him."[40] With this interpretive frame, that race was itself the reason for the encounter and why Zimmerman assumed Martin was suspicious, it is difficult to see how Zimmerman could be acquitted. Because the judge did not allow for race to be considered in the court's deliberations, bringing race into the trial as a framework was not possible. But even if race had been considered, how might the prosecution have convinced the jury that this was indeed a case of racism, something that is officially outlawed by the Matthew Sheperd and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009?[41] Southerland argues that the problem lies in conflicting interpretations of what "racism" means today:

> There is this idea that racism is only this thing you can see, like a cross burning, or a Klan member… But when you have more nuanced connections between race and criminality, like the kind that drives someone to drive up and track someone down and then shoot and kill them when they were doing nothing wrong—it's not the kind of racism of our grandparents, but a more pernicious form of racism.[42]

Though "race" and "racism" continue to remain ambiguous and difficult to define, situations such as the shooting death of African American Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of the shooter who followed Martin for looking "suspicious," deserve more than an ambiguous analysis. Attending to the ambiguities of racism does

---

[40] "How Zimmerman's Colorblind Trial Helps the Justice Dept.'s Case," *COLORLINES*, accessed January 1, 2014,
http://colorlines.com/archives/2013/07/justice_department_hate_crime_case_zimmerman.html.

[41] For the full document of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, see
http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/crm/matthewshepard.php

[42] "How Zimmerman's Colorblind Trial Helps the Justice Dept.'s Case."

not mean denying the significance of race; rather, it highlights the need for greater attention to race and the unequal treatment of persons and communities based on race. Communities of color are not the only ones who need to hear sermons that address this subject, though they are disproportionately impacted by racism. White congregants living in predominantly white neighborhoods and attending predominantly white congregations also need to hear such sermons, and they need to be able to interpret how the maintenance of such segregation may depend upon the perpetuation of harmful racial stereotypes and racial profiling. White preachers must be able to interpret race and racism in society amidst conflicting interpretations, and to be able to offer sermons to their congregations that help congregants interpret race and racism in society as well. This involves a hermeneutic that not only interprets external reality, but also interprets oneself: a hermeneutic that examines the process of personal formation in the life of the preacher as well as in his or her congregation. Helping white congregations think about "race" also involves helping them think about themselves as "white."

The Centrality of "Interpretation" and Its Relationship to the Self

The three hypotheses presented thus far as to why white preachers are reluctant to preach on race and racism are that (1) they have an insufficient understanding of the problem of racism today, (2) they have an inadequate conception of themselves as white, and (3) they lack a theological interpretation for the spiritual harm inflicted upon them and their congregation by continued racism. Together, these hypotheses point to the need for a revised hermeneutic.

By a revised hermeneutic, I refer to a new way of interpreting the world, an interpretation which leads to greater understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In the words of Ricoeur: "Interpretation is the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning."[43] In trying to understand the reluctance of white preachers to preach about racism, I am already interpreting this reluctance and giving three possible sources from which it derives. But in this interpretation of their reluctance, I am interpreting what is already an interpretation—how white preachers view race, racism, and themselves racially. This interpretation of interpretations stems from a desire to understand others, and with that understanding, a desire to see others' interpretations changed. This "teleological" aim derives from my own self-understanding as someone who has been changed by a new way of interpreting the world through the lens of feminist and Womanist theologies.

My process of understanding the current realities of racism began with reading theological examinations of race from the perspective of persons of color. The hermeneutical shift that had lasting consequences on my own interpretive framework occurred in reflection on the word "feminist theology." Growing up, "feminist" was a term I associated with troublesome liberal women, fighting a dead cause. My interpretation of this word changed as a result of my experience as a woman called to ministry; while growing up I knew of no objections to my call to ministry, but once in college I experienced vocal objections to my sense of call because of my woman-ness. The cause of the troublesome feminists suddenly came to life. "Feminism" was now a

---

[43] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 13.

word I interpreted with new meaning, with a sense of solidarity with my experience, and a courage that society can change. Reading feminist theology through this new interpretation of what it meant to be "feminist," I began appreciating the new insights feminist theologians offered of God and of sin, helping me re-interpret the theology of my youth and re-interpret myself. With this new appreciation, I sought to take a course on Feminist Theology. The one course offered was titled "Feminist and Womanist Theologies" and listed books representative of feminist theologians from different racial backgrounds. Thus far, my interpretation of the meaning of "feminist" involved images of women who looked like me and had experiences similar to my own. I found myself less interested in hearing from the voices of women much different from myself. A dear friend intervened, telling me "that's what it means to be feminist today—looking to the experiences of other women." This new interpretation of this word, "feminist," including women different from myself and with experiences unlike my own, led me to a self-understanding of being exclusive. I felt bad when I realized my mistake. This realization gave me an understanding that led me to a new interpretation of another word, "racism." Previously, I would not have considered myself a racist person. My interpretation of "racism" was that it referred to intentional acts of racial prejudice and discrimination. Because I knew racism was wrong, and because I intended no one harm, my interpretation of "racism" led me to feel immune from this particular evil. But this new understanding I received from recognizing my own tendency to avoid learning about the lives of non-white women created an opening towards a new interpretation. Racism was something more insidious, something I could not simply claim exemption from.

In this autobiographical sketch, I present an example of the connection between interpretation and self-understanding, how the way we interpret the meanings of certain words is connected to how we experience the world and ourselves.[44] The study of interpretation involves analyzing how the act of interpretation shapes who we are and how we act in the world. Yet because there are multiple reasons for "being who we are," examining individuals' processes of interpretation is not an *explanation* in the causal sense. The act of interpretation, indeed, the act of interpreting others' interpretations, risks error. Interpretation is not a science, but it is an epistemology or an attempt to understand. "The ontology proposed here is in no way separable from interpretation; it is caught inside the circle formed by the conjunction of the work of interpretation and the interpreted being. It is thus not a triumphant ontology at all; it is not even a science, since it is unable to avoid the *risk* of interpretation… existence as it relates to a hermeneutic philosophy always remains an interpreted existence.[45]"

To interpret the words of preachers and to imbue them with meaning, risks distorting the intentions of the preachers and ignoring the actual effects of these words on the listeners. But this act of interpretation of another's words has the teleological aim of understanding how these preachers understand "racism," and whether this particular understanding they are using in fact hides from them some of the reality that might be better explained under the rubric of "racism." If white preachers understand racism as something exclusive to extremists who are outside their congregation, hateful individuals acting alone, then their understanding prevents them from comprehending the chronic

---

[44] Ricoeur states: "the semantic approach thus entails a reflexive approach." Ibid., 11.

[45] Ibid., 23, 24.

experience of discrimination of persons of color. A limited interpretation yields a limited understanding of reality. One of the first things this dissertation analyzes is the different understandings of "racism" and how a more adequate understanding of current forms of racism can equip a white preacher to be able to recognize racism more readily in society at large.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Interpreting White Racial Identity</h3>

In order to preach effectively on racism, white preachers need a revised conceptual understanding of the meaning of racism today, but having a new conceptual understanding is not enough. White preachers also need to be able to observe and understand how the meaning of racism impacts their own self-understanding as "white." The self-reflexive understanding of being white and how one feels about being white are summarized by the term "racial identity." The racial identity of a person is different from their race. A person's "race" is the socially-constructed category externally attributed to him or her, while "racial identity" involves more specifically the internal meaning one ascribes to that racial designation.

In her study of a multi-racial congregation, Korie Edwards describes the differences in self-ascribed identity between the members of the congregation who are white from those who are persons of color.[46] While African Americans in the congregation were much more likely to think of themselves in terms of their racial identity, the white congregants did not mention their racial identity as part of how they understood themselves. Yet these same white congregants all believed that racism

---

[46] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, 84–89.

continued to be a problem in the United States, and that racism put African Americans and other persons of color at a disadvantage.[47] These white congregants, though able to articulate a structural understanding of the continued existence of racism, were not able to consider themselves as white as being particularly advantaged in this social structure. Edwards concludes: "while interracial interactions have the capacity to influence the racial attitudes of whites, they do not necessarily impact how they view their own location in the social structure and the consequences of that location. In other words, interracial interactions, for whites, do not affect the salience of their own racial identities. Race continues to be about other people."[48]

Developmental psychologist Janet Helms has studied racial identity among whites and persons of color, and has identified different stages of development for both groups.[49] In learning about racism, whites may respond differently depending upon how they view themselves as white, and Helms predicts a certain progression of developmental stages that lead a white person to develop a positive white racial identity that is not based on false illusions of superiority over others. That is, Helms sees "healthy" racial identity development as building to a positive view of oneself as white. This ability to view oneself positively as being a white person comes at the cost of struggling to understand the continued significance of racism and also discovering the history of white "allies" who have worked for racial equality. By understanding the stages of white racial identity

---

[47] Ibid., 99.

[48] Ibid., 100.

[49] Janet E. Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1990); Janet E. Helms, "An Update of Helms's White and People of Color Racial Identity Models," in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995), 181–198.

development, and using these frames as interpretive tools to view oneself as white, the white preacher can move towards a more positive white racial identity in the process of working for racial justice.

Interpreting Racism Theologically

While white preachers need an effective hermeneutic for interpreting the social significance of racism and their own white racial identity, they also need to be able to interpret racism theologically in order to fulfill their vocation as Christian ministers responding to racism. In understanding racism as sin, white preachers are expressing the belief that racism interferes with the relationship humans have with God. Considering racism as sin enables the preacher to ask questions relating antiracism to the spiritual health of the congregation.

The works of black theologians, *mujerista* and Latino/a theologians, Asian American theologians and theologians from the Two-Thirds World have recounted personal experiences of racism as well as reflections on how theology can motivate us to act for a more just society.[50] At the same time, theology has not always supported the cause of those experiencing injustice, and in fact has been used to further buttress the privileges of the dominant group of whites in society.[51] Thus, white preachers need to be aware of how racism has been supported theologically in the past, as well as how we can

---

[50] This experience is not unique, as demonstrated by the work of Emerson and Smith in depicting the theological worldviews of Evangelical Christians whose inability to connect sin with larger social problems prevented them from understanding racism as an ongoing problem. See Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

[51] Some scholars argue this is still the case, and that the theistic theologies even from persons of color need to be abandoned for a humanistic one. See: William R. Jones, *Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); For a black scholar who has taken this route by advocating a humanistic and non-theistic theology, see Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

employ a faithful Christian theology that challenges persistent racism. The hermeneutic white preachers use for examining racism, white identity, and the Christian ethical response to ongoing racism must reflect a *theological* understanding of the significance of racism today, drawing from the metaphors for sin that provide imagery for how sin functions to separate persons from God, from themselves, and from others. White preachers also need to know how even in the process of speaking about racism, they too can continue to buttress the system by perpetuating paternalistic stances and harmful stereotypes. The work of Stephen Ray illuminates this danger in his work *Do No Harm*.

Several theologians in the past five decades have based their theological inquiry in an understanding of racism as a fundamental problem in American Christianity. George Kelsey, a professor who taught Martin Luther King, Jr. at Morehouse and wrote *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, J. Kameron Carter who authored *Race: A Theological Account*, and M. Shawn Copeland whose recent book is *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* are three of the theologians who have connected discussions of race with theology.[52] Specifically, these authors provide crisp imagery that draws from the metaphors for sin in Christian tradition to illuminate the effects of racism on the spiritual life of individual believers and society. Familiar terms for sin such as idolatry, estrangement and bondage are reinvested with new meaning that help whites understand the competing worldviews of white normativity and the norm-defying inclusivity of Jesus Christ. These metaphors reveal the distance racism puts between persons of different races as well as from God, but also the seeming intractability of

---

[52] George D. Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (Charles Scribner's, 1965); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2008); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

racism as a prison from which we never seem to be free. In naming racism in these ways, the white preacher points not only to the continued significance of racism in society and individual lives, but also to the need persons have for a God who saves. These theologians call attention to the role of God in redeeming humanity, acknowledging that humans cannot save themselves, and seeing in the image of the body of Christ a witness to the unity of humanity. By drawing from these theologians, white preachers can help congregations interpret the saving significance of a God who redeems people from their sins.

Theological understandings of racism as sin are important aspects of an interpretative framework for white preachers in preaching about racism, and theology as knowledge about or a way of thinking of sin and God is never content to remain merely a cognitive effort; theology ultimately aims towards personal transformation. This is true particularly when considering the recognition of racism. Racism, as other forms of evil, cannot be considered only in intellectual terms. Our personal character is involved in how we consider and respond to such evil. In *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, Paul Ricoeur discusses the way evil cannot be explained philosophically or theologically in terms of theodicy: "the problem of evil is not just a speculative problem: it calls for a convergence between thought, action (in the moral and political sense) and a spiritual transformation of one's feelings."[53] The above theological interpretations of racism as sin are helpful in shifting one's spiritual feelings of guilt towards feelings of dependence upon God and a desire to pursue justice. In order for these metaphors of sin to be "productive," they must actually shift persons' feelings and orientation, drawing them

---

[53] Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, trans. John Stephen Bowden (London; New York: Continuum, 2007), 64.

towards God. It is this orientation that reminds white preachers that they cannot solve the problem of racism or any other form of evil. Ricoeur writes: "It is to this aporia that action and spirituality are called to give, not a solution, but a *response* aimed at making the aporia productive; in other words, at continuing the work of thought in the key of acting and feeling."[54] While thinking is not enough, neither is acting: working towards justice is never completed, "the practical response is not enough."[55] To place absolute faith in the impact of personal efforts to end racism is to deny the widespread and elusive nature of this evil. The role of feelings and spiritual orientation is to keep alive the complaint against evil, to resist resignation and indifference. Thus, the recognition of evil involves not only a cognitive recognition, but also challenges individuals to commit to a process of self-reflection and personal response.

Converging Thinking, Feeling and Acting: Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Philosophy

Thus far, the argument has centered around interpretation as a key to understanding the process of overcoming reticence to preach on racism. The hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur provides the best framework for the three elements of interpretation outlined above because of his attention to the integration of thinking, feeling, and acting. Ricoeur has already been broadly influential for white homileticians, though never before has Ricoeur's philosophy of hermeneutics been used to interpret whiteness or race as such.[56] Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy combines attention to

---

[54] Ibid., 65–66.

[55] Ibid., 67.

selfhood, narrative, and ethics, culminating in a move towards a hermeneutic of recognition. This is seen most clearly in Ricoeur's last book *The Course of Recognition*.[57] Here, Ricoeur examines the various meanings of the word "recognition"—considering its definitions as a mastery of knowledge and identification, a recognition or identification of oneself, and finally its political significance within the context of "mutual recognition." This last definition is most commonly used by the political theorists that have argued that oppression persists today in the devaluation of marginalized identities, theorists such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor who have drawn from the notion of the "struggle for recognition" in the philosophy of Hegel.[58] Ricoeur offers his own take on mutual recognition by discussing the economy of the gift exchange, a moment that involves all three forms of recognition and that culminates in the expression of gratitude. It is this unique perspective on recognition as gift exchange that will provide a fruitful resource for constructing a hermeneutic of recognition for white preachers preaching about racism, in that a movement towards gratitude has strong resonances within a Christian proclamation of God's grace.

Throughout this book, Ricoeur draws from his earlier works on narrative identity and ethics, themes present in *Oneself as Another* and *Time and Narrative*, as well as his

---

[56] Two examples of homiletic works that draw from Ricoeur include Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); and Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2013).

[57] Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[58] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995); Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

later works on justice, *The Just* and *Reflections on the Just.*[59] In another late work,

Memory, History, Forgetting, he discusses the role of remembering historical injustices

and questions why some genocides in Europe's history such as the Holocaust have been

remembered while others such as the Armenian genocide have been forgotten.[60] In the

Epilogue, Ricoeur examines the unequal exchange between guilt and forgiveness, a

vertical relationship where the depth of guilt is incomparable to the height of

forgiveness.[61] These deliberations, as well as his discussion on viewing oneself as another

in light of the ethical injunction to love the other as oneself in his earlier work *Oneself as*

Another, demonstrate his close connections to the Christian tradition, making his

reflection on recognition to be a helpful conversation partner for Christian preachers.

Literature Review

While there are many ways to approach the continuing problem of racism in

today's society, the problem I wish to address is an issue within homiletics, the academic

field in which I locate myself as a scholar. While others could well approach the problem

of white reluctance to preach on race primarily from a psychological, ethical, or

sociological perspective, I propose to construct a homiletical response that offers an

interpretive framework for preaching on racism. My dissertation will draw, as does the

---

[59] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[60] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[61] Ibid., 459.

homiletical field itself, from a wider range of interdisciplinary approaches, but my final contribution will be made primarily within the homiletical world. Thus, I will restrict my examination of the current available resources to those within homiletics, both as textbooks and academic dissertations.

<p style="text-align:center;">Homiletical Textbooks</p>

In the field of homiletics, there are few resources for how whites can address racism homiletically, and all of them have been resources devoted to issues of social injustice more broadly rather than to racism alone. Some of these books have tended to be sermon compilations with examples of how preachers have preached on particular social issues, such as *Just Preaching*, edited by Andre Resner.[62] Books that have offered a more theoretical approach have included Christine Smith's *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance,* Charles Campbell's *The Word Before the Powers,* and Philip Wogaman's *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World.*[63]

While each of the aforementioned books have served a purpose in calling attention to preaching on themes of social justice, none of them address preaching on racism as an issue of hermeneutics. Smith's book provides critical analysis of white racism as one of several forms of "radical evil" continuing to oppress persons in

---

[62] André Resner, *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice* (Chalice Press, 2003).

[63] Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

society,[64] and suggests "conversion" as the only adequate response. This includes the need for whites to confess their whiteness as a source of unjust privileges.[65] While her analysis of racism is instructive and helpful, she does not provide a coherent hermeneutic for whites preachers to move beyond the stage of "conversion," helping them understand alternate ways of being white in the world and how Christianity functions as resource for Christians responding to racism.

Campbell's book draws from the work of Walter Wink in identifying oppression as among the "powers and principalities," a way of locating racism within the biblical narrative as an issue of injustice as well as spiritual malady.[66] Locating racism as one of several manifestations of the "Domination System"[67] as Campbell describes it, portrays racism as systemic rather than only individual acts. While this analysis expands more outdated understandings of racism as individual acts, it can also lend itself to ignoring the ways that racism is indeed carried out in mundane acts. Focusing only on racism as "the powers and principalities" can also overshadow the embodied significance of white racial identity. While there is much to commend Campbell's work, his analysis does not offer a clear and comprehensive way to interpret the experiences of white persons living in a society plagued by racism.

Wogaman's book comes out of his extensive experience preaching prophetically in a large mainline congregation, and this experience comes across in his insistence on a

---

[64] Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 3.

[65] Ibid., 124.

[66] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 7.

[67] Ibid., 26.

pastoral approach to challenging the congregation. He emphasizes the importance of

authentically loving the congregation, seeing all persons as deeply loved by God, and that

it is only out of that love and acknowledgement of the deep worth of each human being

that preachers can speak a prophetic word.[68] At the same time, Wogaman's work does not

address the specific challenges of what white identity means to congregants today, and

how white persons can feel deeply their inherent worth as God's children yet remain

oblivious to how they perpetuate a system that denies the inherent worth of others.

Wogaman's contribution is his insistence on a pastoral approach, but his work ultimately

lacks specificity for how whites can experience their deep worth, while also recognizing

continued racism and the salience of white racial identity.

Academic Dissertations

There have also been three dissertations that have sought to address preaching on

racism within the past ten years: two are D.Min. theses written by students at the Aquinas

Institute for Theology, connected to St. Louis University, and a Ph.D. dissertation written

by Geoffrey Noel Schoomaker at Vanderbilt University.[69] The D.Min. dissertations from

the Aquinas Institute for Theology both approach the subject of racism as something

easily identifiable by the preacher and the congregation, where preaching on racism is

simply a matter of acknowledging racism as sin and preaching against it. This

---

[68] Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 16.

[69] Steven Anthony Janoski, "Preaching for Conversion: Racism in the Small Church" (D.Min., Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2003); Kevin R. Huber, "Thy Kingdom Come: Healing Racial Dysfunction in the Faith Community through Preaching and the Prophetic Imagination" (D.Min., Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2008); Geoffrey Noel Schoonmaker, "Preaching about Race: A Homiletic for Racial Reconciliation" (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, 2012).

framework, however, does not allow for the complexity of how persons, particularly white persons, understand the meaning of "racism" and how congregants may have different understandings for what "counts" as racism today. Schoonmaker's Ph.D. dissertation from Vanderbilt also assumes a particular interpretation of what constitutes racism, relying on the work of critical race theorists.[70] Schoonmaker's project does not allow for the difficulties in helping white preachers understand themselves as white and how they can engage in anti-racism preaching. Thus, none of these works take seriously the task of understanding what it means to be white in today's society amidst conflicting interpretations of racism. Neither homiletical textbooks nor academic dissertations have addressed the need for a way of moving white preachers and congregants from a particular way of interpreting themselves as white within society into another interpretive framework that will serve them more effectively in addressing the ongoing nature of racism today.

Thesis

This chapter has suggested three possible reasons for the lack of sermons on racism by white preachers: 1) an inadequate understanding of racism today, 2) an insufficient understanding of the salience of white racial identity, and 3) an underdeveloped theology of sin for preaching about racism. This dissertation proceeds by examining each of these sources of reticence in the following three chapters, looking at the conflict of interpretations regarding the meaning of racism in chapter two, discussing the difficulties of personal formation regarding the development of a positive white racial

---

[70] Geoffrey Noel Schoonmaker, "White Racism in Homiletic Textbooks: An Initial Glance" (presented at the Academy of Homiletics, Chicago, Ill., November 16, 2012).

identity in chapter three, and describing the sins of sin-talk when preaching about racism and offering a greater theological repertoire for understanding racism as sin in chapter four. This fourth chapter points to the ultimate inadequacy of human efforts to release ourselves from the sin of racism, calling attention to God's reconciling grace in Jesus Christ. It is this gift of grace that enables whites to work towards racial justice, accepting with gratitude that Jesus Christ alone reconciles persons to God and to one another.

Each response to the forms of reticence is itself a process of interpretation, underlining the central significance of hermeneutics to effective preaching on racism. The interpretive process of sermon preparation involves these three elements: identification, personalization, and gratitude, three elements drawn from the hermeneutic of recognition described by Paul Ricoeur. This hermeneutic, in acknowledging the difficult task of interpretation, accepts the inherent risk of error at every step in the interpretive process. **This dissertation argues that in order to overcome a reluctance to preach about racism, white preachers need to employ an alternative interpretive framework, which I depict here as the hermeneutics of recognition, which include acknowledging the difficulty of identifying racism, moving towards personal formation by recognizing the salience of one's white racial identity, and in preaching about racism out of the recognition that the depth of human sinfulness can only be redeemed by the gift of God that calls us to gratitude.**

This interpretative framework termed the "hermeneutics of recognition," provides insight into the process of whites recognizing themselves and others within the current racial landscape of America. This hermeneutic includes an acknowledgement of the risk of mis-recognition, conceding that the identification of racism is not always easy.

Additionally, this hermeneutic pays attention to the narratives forming and shaping the racial identity of a preacher and the racial identities of those in one's congregation. In recognizing themselves and others within this hermeneutic, white preachers can begin to recognize the tension present in the conflicting interpretations surrounding current racism, working to understand this tension in light of their vocation as preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Method and Summary of Chapters

As discussed in the Introduction, the methodology of this dissertation is actually a combination of methods. Most broadly, this dissertation follows the practical theological method of Richard Osmer in its pursuit of the four-fold tasks of descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic.[71] The descriptive-empirical task involves the posing of the problem of the lack of white preachers' sermons on racism, and in the chapters to come, several sermons will be examined using discourse analysis to interpret the views of racism contained within those sermons. Thus, descriptive-empirical task herein points to the interpretive task as well. In engaging in the interpretive task by analyzing sermons and the current state of racism in the United States, I also employ interpretation or hermeneutics as a methodology for the descriptive tasks. In the Introduction I discussed the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology as serving as a foundation for understanding how white preachers understand racism and themselves as white. The normative element within this dissertation comes out of my commitments to

---

[71] Osmer, *Practical Theology.*

the Christian faith tradition as seen in my section on the theologies of sin.[72] The

pragmatic element is the framework offered to help white preachers understand the task

of preaching about racism, an interpretative framework referred to here as the

hermeneutics of recognition.

In the chapters that follow, I will focus on each element of the process of white

preachers recognizing racism, and though they are presented in three chapters as though

they were distinct, these elements lead to and flow out of one another in a hermeneutics

of recognition as I shall argue in the final two chapters. Chapter two presents the problem

of an inadequate understanding of racism held by many white Christians and

demonstrated in the preaching of white preachers. This problem is presented first by

analyzing the sermons of two white preachers that addressed racism in a sermon, one

directly and the other indirectly. Because the dearth of sermons on racism by white

preachers prevents me from deducing a more complete picture of white preachers'

attitudes on race and racism, I then turn to the in-depth study of racial attitudes among

evangelical Christians of Michael Emerson and Christian Smith from their book, *Divided

by Faith*.[73] Their assessment is that that white evangelicals do not view racism as a

serious problem and have an insufficient understanding of racism, and that this arises out

of their particular cultural framework. I then argue that the reason for the lack of sermons

on racism by whites and the inadequacy of white evangelicals' interpretive framework for

understanding racism are both linked to the changing definitions of racism itself. I will

---

[72] See the Introduction for a more complete description of my commitments informing my methodology within this dissertation.

[73] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

examine the politically-contested nature of race and racism through the theory of racial formation of Michael Omi and Howard Winant.[74] These theorists employ definitions of race and racism that identify these terms as historically-contextual and changing as a result of political contestation.[75] Omi and Winant's understanding of racism as racial hegemony and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's portrayal of color-blind racism will help provide a framework for understanding racism as a racialized social structure that benefits whites to the disadvantage of persons of color.

The third chapter examines the difficulty whites have in comprehending the salience of white racial identity. First, I draw from Korie Edwards' study to show that indeed white church-goers are less likely to identify themselves in racial terms, even when they are part of an interracial church congregation. I argue that this lack of identification expresses an inability to interpret the salience of whiteness in a society that continues to provide benefits to whites and disadvantages to non-whites. It is also difficult to understand the salience of white racial identity when such understanding can lead to psychological dissonance. Thus, I begin to offer a more adequate understanding of white racial identity through the work of developmental psychologists Janet Helms, Beverly Daniel Tatum and Robert Carter. These authors provide a psychological examination of the constantly-shifting racial identity of white persons, acknowledging the difficulty whites have understanding themselves as "white" and experiencing this

---

[74] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Conclusion: Racial Formation Rules: Continuity, Instability, and Change," in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 302–331.

[75] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

designation positively.[76] From there, I introduce the work of ethnographers John Hartigan, Julie Lindquist, and Monica McDermott who will be put into conversation with theorists of white identity to argue for a more nuanced culturally- and location-specific understanding of the forces shaping and re-shaping white identity.[77] These ethnographers introduce the complexities of class to the interpretation of a salient white racial identity. From the dialectic of psychological development and ethnography of working-class whites, I introduce a normative movement towards an anti-racist white identity that operates out of the hermeneutic positionality of the white person's unique social location. Drawing from the hermeneutic philosophy of Linda Martín Alcoff,[78] I argue for understanding white racial identity as a positionality or horizon from which whites can move towards anti-racism, a horizon which limits their ability to understand the experiences of persons of color, but a horizon that also depends upon their own social location and experiences.

The fourth chapter grounds these understandings of racism and racial identity theologically, by providing classical metaphors for sin to reflect upon the spiritual harm inflicted upon all persons by racism. First, I argue that preaching about racism can itself "sin" by perpetuating harmful stereotypes and a paternalistic stance towards non-whites, building on the work of Stephen Ray to analyze such stereotypes present in a white

---

[76] Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*; Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom," *Harvard Educational Review* 62, no. 1 (1992): 1–24; Robert T. Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model* (John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

[77] Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*; Julie Lindquist, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); Monica McDermott, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[78] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

preacher's sermon. Thus, the task of preaching about racism is not seen as something that can be accomplished easily through individual will power. Even white preachers' desire to preach about racism and the content of such sermons can actually contribute to the very racism they seek to uproot. Through the work of George Kelsey, J. Kameron Carter, and M. Shawn Copeland, this chapter examines the metaphors of sin as idolatry, sin as estrangement, and sin as bondage, to help whites interpret theologically the impact of racism on society and individuals, arguing that the intractable nature of racism as sin points whites to their absolute dependence upon a God who redeems humanity in Jesus Christ.

The fifth chapter expounds upon Paul Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* as it provides a framework for a three-fold process of recognition that includes identification, self-recognition, and mutual recognition. Before presenting Ricoeur's analysis of recognition, I will discuss the context for the term "recognition" in political philosophical discussions of theories of justice, such as that of Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor, as well the critiques of recognition from Nancy Fraser and Kelly Oliver.[79] Ricoeur's work adds to the conversation of philosophical forms of recognition by beginning with a lexical account of the different forms of recognition and likens the internal logic of these semantic definitions to the philosophical uses of recognition. In this internal movement from the identification form of recognition to self-recognition, Ricoeur highlights the ability to recognize oneself as a capable and hence responsible human person, thus

---

[79] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Fortress Press, 2011); Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2003); Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

connecting self-recognition with an ethical move towards others in mutual recognition. When discussing mutual recognition philosophically, Ricoeur draws from the lexical definition of recognition as "gratitude" to argue for an image of mutual recognition rooted in the model of the gift exchange, rather than struggle. This gratitude in turn enables individuals to return to forms of recognition-identification and self-recognition through the lens of gratitude. By the end of the chapter, I will have presented Ricoeur's hermeneutic of recognition as a resource for understanding the tenuous process of interpretation of ideas, oneself, and one's interactions with others, ending and rooted in gratitude.

The sixth chapter builds out of Ricoeur's "course" of recognition a framework for white preachers preaching on racism, drawing together the insights of chapters two through five. This chapter seeks to provide a resource for recognizing racism amidst the complexities of whites' experiences and points us toward a three-fold hermeneutics of recognition for homiletics. While a complete pedagogical model for teaching white preachers is not part of the current research, this chapter points towards several suggestions for incorporating this hermeneutic in the teaching of homiletics students. A discussion of a sermon preached in response to the George Zimmerman acquittal, announced shortly before the Sunday morning service, is presented to demonstrate the effective use of this hermeneutic.

Chapter 2

Changing the Subject: Conflicting Interpretations of the Meaning of Racism

"…[T]o recognize the racial dimension in social structure is to interpret the meaning of race."[1]

"A major problem in understanding race relations in the United States is that we tend to understand race, racism, and the form of racialization as constants rather than as variables."[2]

This chapter argues that one of the reasons white preachers may not be preaching sermons about racism is that they do not have an adequate understanding of what "racism" means today. I demonstrate this inadequacy of understanding by examining two sermons by white preachers. Because the available data is limited concerning the use of the term "racism" in sermons preached by white preachers, I then turn to the study of white evangelicals by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith whose focus on racial attitudes among evangelical Christians[3] provides a rich data source for understanding the way white Christians (albeit the subset that self-identify as "evangelical") understand the word "racism" today.[4] After reviewing the interpretive framework of white evangelical Christians as presented by Emerson and Smith's study, I will discuss further why it is difficult for whites to understand what is meant by the term racism, based on the way the word has changed in meaning over time. The work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant

---

[1] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 57.

[2] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 8.

[3] Emerson and Smith use the term "evangelical" to refer to persons who self-identify as such, who view the Bible as their "ultimate authority," who emphasize the importance of evangelism or sharing their faith with others, and who believe that Jesus is the Savior of all who accept him as such. Evangelicals interviewed by Emerson and Smith come from all different ethnicities and racial backgrounds, though 90 percent of evangelicals are white, and come from different religious affiliations (mainline Protestant, Catholic, non-denominational, etc.).

[4] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

will be cited, as they have traced the changing meanings of race and racism and described this process of change as "racial formation." These theorists challenge the assumption that it is only out of ignorance, denial, or malice that whites maintain a particular limited interpretation of race and racism; it is that they are relying on an older interpretation of the meaning of racism that no longer applies to the shifting nature of society's racial structure.

Finally, drawing from the work of contemporary racial theorist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, I will outline the characteristics of interpretive frameworks that are no longer sufficient for understanding race and racism today, arguing for an interpretive framework of racism that instead links the interpersonal with the systemic, that relies on current statistical data for understanding white racial dominance, and that views racism less as intentional acts of discrimination than the overall effect of a racialized society that continues to benefit whites to the disadvantage of persons of color. The definition of racism that I will put forth at the conclusion of this chapter is a racialized social structure that benefits whites to the disadvantage of persons of color. Within this racialized social structure, the justifications used for supporting this racialization are drawn from racial stereotypes. Because whites benefit from this structure, such justifications are considered "rational" in that they preserve the racial hierarchy. Using this interpretive framework, I will return to analyzing the sermon samples of white preachers who have referred to race or racism even in subtle terms, evaluating the interpretive framework they are employing in their discussion, and arguing for the importance of hermeneutics in the process of changing persons' frameworks for understanding and responding to racism today.

"Racism" in Sermons: Discourse Analysis of the Word-In-Use

To gauge the kind of rhetoric around race and racism currently in use by white preachers, I studied samples of sermons preached across the country in white churches from a variety of denominations.[5] I focused specifically on the Sunday prior to the day honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., assuming that if white preachers were to mention race, it might be as a result of discussing King's legacy. Of the sermons preached in fifty churches on January 20, 2013, only ten sermons mentioned Martin Luther King, Jr., with nine of the ten references to King being tangential to the focus of the sermon. None of the ten sermons mentioning King included any direct analysis of "racism." Only one of the ten that made mention of King also commented on the subject of race, with this preacher reflecting that there still exists "an unholy alliance between race and poverty."[6] The cause of this "unholy alliance" was left unnamed.

Sermon Sample 1 – The "Unholy Alliance"

The one sermon that mentioned race or racism specifically in the sample of fifty sermons from January 20, 2013 was preached by a white preacher in a large congregation that lists three African Americans on their clergy staff of nine clergypersons. Given the interracial nature of the staff, it might be assumed that the congregation itself included greater racial diversity. Pictures of the congregation available on the church's website, however, show a predominantly white congregation, with only one person of color pictured in a large group photograph.

---

[5] See MLK Sunday White Sermon Study in Appendix.

[6] See Appendix.

The text for the sermon was the Wedding at Cana, John 2:1-11, one of the lectionary texts for that Sunday, and the sermon's theme was the importance of witnesses who testify that God's grace is sufficient, citing the example of Jesus turning water into wine as sign of God's sufficient grace. The sermon then moves into a discussion of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was one of the "great witnesses of our age." After providing some biographical information about King, the preacher continues:

> I realize now that Dr. King's dream was bigger and better than I understood when I first heard it. It wasn't just about him, or people like him. It wasn't just about freeing some of us from the oppression of separate but unequal segregation. It was about respecting the dignity of every human being. It was about there being enough for all of us to experience new life together. This is not just his dream, of course. It is also God's dream. We know that now. And, with God's help, we have made some progress. Statutory segregation has been eliminated. Doors to schools, businesses and churches have been opened and the glass and marble ceilings in those institutions have been raised.
> But, I think we can all agree that there is more to be done.
> There is still an unholy alliance between race and poverty in this country. We see it in educational achievement. We see it in unemployment figures. We see it in incarceration rates. And, we need to do something to stop the violence that is threatening our children. I realize that the world is different now. I realize that many of the problems we are facing seem like they are more difficult to solve, and that many of the questions we are asking seem like they are more difficult to answer. But, one truth remains. The grace of God is enough for all of us to experience new life together. And, there just isn't any way, really, to talk about the truth of God in Christ without witnesses.

The sermon presents the work of King as pursuing "God's dream. We all know that now." That is, the vision of racial justice proclaimed by King that challenged segregation and racial discrimination is a vision "we all know" to be "God's dream," or God's vision for humanity. This assumes that the message of racial integration, challenging the "separate but unequal" lived experiences for persons of different races, is something that is no longer controversial. It is a vision "we all know" to be God's vision, a universally acceptable vision for society. The preacher remarks that "with God's help,

we have made some progress," detailing the legislative changes that have outlawed intentional segregation based on racial discrimination. Yet, this preacher also acknowledges "we can all agree that there is more work to be done." That is, the work of pursuing God's dream is not yet complete regarding racial equality. The need for more work is something "we can all agree on," according to this preacher. The signs that there is more work to be done include an "unholy alliance between race and poverty…educational achievement…unemployment…[and] incarceration." Furthermore, we must "Do something to stop the violence that is threatening our children." Without citing statistics or mentioning specific races in this "unholy alliance," the preacher relies on the shared understanding of the congregation to convey something "we can all agree on," which is that more work needs to be done to make these figures of educational attainment, unemployment and incarceration more equal, or at least more representative of the actual population.

Sermon Sample 2 – Tolerance and the Aryan Nations

In an earlier year's sample of MLK Sunday sermons, another preacher's sermon made a very subtle reference to racism, albeit entirely void of racial language. The excerpt below comes from a sermon preached by a white preacher at a church known for its politically conservative views.[7] Though "racism" was never mentioned directly, as was the case with nearly all sermons sampled, the preacher mentions "Aryan Nations" in a condemnatory tone, in the process of critiquing what the preacher viewed as compulsory "tolerance" regarding religious pluralism:

---

[7] See Appendix. By "conservative," here I refer to the church's current stance rejecting the leadership of LGBTQ persons in forms of ecclesial governance.

> Today's big argument against our faith is, "Look at all the other religions. How can you impose your beliefs on all these other people?" In many ways, America's real religion is "live and let live," "do your own thing." All roads if followed sincerely will lead equally to the same God. (Never mind sincere followers of Al Qaeda or sincere followers of Aryan Nations—we don't want to think about that.) Hey, it's all about tolerance.

In this passage, the preacher presents today's cultural context as one that stresses religious diversity, an emphasis which the preacher sees as being used as a "big argument against our faith." According to this preacher, the church's faith is under attack by outsiders who question why they impose their beliefs on "all these other people." Because persons in this church supposedly do not agree with the statement "all roads if followed sincerely will lead equally to the same God," their beliefs run counter to "America's real religion" which the preacher indicates is to "live and let live." However, the preacher adds a parenthetical remark: "(Never mind sincere followers of Al Qaeda or sincere followers of Aryan Nations—we don't want to think about that)."[8] In other words, the preacher sees "America's real religion" of tolerance as being hypocritical in that it argues against more exclusive faiths, but at the same time would not "think about" the "sincere followers of Al Qaeda or sincere followers of Aryan Nations."

This is a complex rhetorical example, in that the preacher is setting up a critique of an unnamed external ideology that challenges the faith of the congregation. This critique works by calling attention to the existence of these two infamous hate groups who should not be extended "tolerance," implying in this example that tolerance has its limits. Within this argument, the preacher assumes that the listeners agree with those espousing the values of tolerance, that Al Qaeda and the Aryan Nations are not

---

[8] The parentheses appear in the written manuscript.

acceptable forms of religious expression. The preacher makes it seem however, that the emphasis on "tolerance" makes it harder for the tolerance enthusiasts to critique these groups. The preacher seems to suggest that tolerance only goes so far, as it would not support religious devotion to a group associated with terror (Al Qaeda) or with racism (Aryan Nations). In this way, the preacher presumes a common assumption that both of these organizations, Al Qaeda and the Aryan Nations, and what they stand for, terror and racism, are wrong and not worth supporting under the call for tolerance. In this move, the preacher is also linking a terrorist organization with a racist one. This connection is valid (racism is definitely a form of terrorism, and particularly racist groups continue to commit acts of terror), but by making this association, all forms of racism that are less "extreme" or visible are eclipsed. Racism is associated with the self-identifying extremists who intentionally associate with these malicious groups, and not with the unintentional participation in a racist system or the structure of a racist society as a whole. Additionally, like the preacher from the first sermon sample, this preacher conveys that they are all alike in a shared understanding of what racism looks like today.

Studying the Interpretive Framework of White Evangelicals

Because the sample of sermons that actually address racism is so limited, it is not sufficient to assume from the small sampling what the majority of white preachers believe about racism. However, by looking at a larger sampling of the beliefs of white Christians regarding racism, we can draw connections between the perspectives of the laity and those of the clergy. That is, the interpretive frameworks in use by white laity can

tell us what interpretive frameworks their clergy might be employing which prevents

them from seeing racism as something worthy of preaching against.

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, drawing from surveys of 2,500 white

evangelical Christians[9] as well as hundreds of face-to-face interviews, describe the

interpretive frameworks being used to think and talk about race and racism today.[10] They

rely on this information from laity, rather than focusing on the clergy, because they view

the role of religious leaders as having a limited ability to deviate from the social

perspectives of their congregants. They write:

> …[W]hen clergy or denominational leaders act in ways too deviant from the laity,
> the laity either leave or fire the religious officials. We do not want to suggest that
> religious leaders have not power or authority. They often do. But as Max Weber
> noted nearly a century ago, religious authority is rooted in charisma, within the
> confines of a group's concerns. …This ability stems from the charismatic figure's
> gift to communicate people's felt needs and embody religious solutions to those
> needs. Leaders must both understand the social locations of their followers and
> speak their language. …leaders thus must usually come from social locations
> similar to those of their parishioners. And…this hampers the prophetic role of
> religion.[11]

Thus, the views of the laity are often reflected in the views of the preacher, because of the

high similarity in social position and perspective between congregants and religious

leaders. Emerson and Smith point to the "homophily principle," which says that because

of the market conditions of religious pluralism, persons tend to attend religious

---

[9] Emerson and Smith define "evangelical" with the following four broad characteristics: 1) a high view of scriptural authority, 2) belief in Jesus Christ as the sole route to salvation, 3) an emphasis on a conversion experience (being "born again"), and 4) engagement in evangelism. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

[10] While my dissertation addresses white preachers from both evangelical and liberal traditions, I should mention that many white Christians from across mainline "liberal" denominations identify as evangelicals. It would be helpful to have a study similar to Emerson and Smith's that interviewed self-identifying "liberal" Christians, especially since many liberal white Christians were involved in abolitionism and the Civil Rights movement. However, as of the writing of this dissertation, no such wide-scale data analysis of this sub-set of Christians had been done.

[11] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 167.

organizations that are the most likely to provide a sense of meaning and belonging, and once they begin to feel too much on the margins of this group, they will leave and join another organization where they can feel a greater sense of belonging.[12] This sense of belonging has to do with identity and how similar one experiences oneself to be to the others in the organization. Thus, this impacts the freedom of the religious leader in offering prophetic social critique. Emerson and Smith write: "the shape the laity want the prophetic voice to take is usually that which supports their own felt needs."[13] If the preacher consistently veers too much from the felt needs and views of the congregation, the members may choose to go elsewhere. Because of this, it is essential for preachers to understand the views and interpretive frameworks of their congregants. At the same time, interpretive frameworks are not static and unchangeable; knowing these interpretive frameworks and being aware of alternative and more preferable interpretive frameworks can help white preachers maintain the ability to speak in ways that meet the needs of the congregation, while also challenging them to view the world differently.

In Emerson and Smith's study of white evangelical Christians, the results of a survey of over 2,500 white evangelicals showed that eighty percent viewed racism as a "very important issue to address."[14] Yet in the actual face-to-face interviews Emerson and Smith conducted, the white respondents could not provide concrete examples of

---

[12] Ibid., 147; citing the work of Pamela Popielarz and J. Miller McPherson, "On the Edge or in Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1995): 678–721.

[13] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 165.

[14] Ibid., 86.

racism today.[15] After continuing to press the interviewees on this issue, some would

come up with historical examples such as separate water fountains or Ku Klux Klan

activity, but many cited examples of "reverse racism" such as affirmative action and

blacks' hostility to whites.[16] White evangelicals viewed "racism" as a problem, but they

could not articulate how it remained problematic today.

In fact, many of them denied that there remained a significant race problem.

While most assented to existence of racism more broadly as a result of human

imperfection, few believed that wide-spread discrimination remained that inhibited the

life chances of racial minorities. Emerson and Smith contextualized their interviewees as

coming from predominantly white neighborhoods and attending predominantly white

congregations, suggesting that their racial isolation prevented them from seeing racism as

anything other than individual-level prejudice and discrimination.[17] Because they view

racism as individual-level discrimination, and they do not view themselves as

discriminating on the basis of race, "they wonder why they must be challenged with a

problem they did not and do not cause. As they communicated to us over and over, they

do not have much interracial contact, but when they do, they are friendly toward people

they do meet from other races, and some even claim healthy interracial friendships."[18]

Emerson and Smith argue that this particular interpretive framework, what they term the

---

[15] Ibid., 86–87.

[16] Ibid., 87.

[17] Ibid., 87–89.

[18] Ibid., 89.

"cultural tools" employed by these white evangelicals, prevents persons from seeing racial inequality and the significance of race in the United States today.[19]

Emerson and Smith depict white evangelicals' interpretive framework for understanding racism as consisting in an emphasis on individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism. "Individualism" includes the basic belief in equal opportunity, and the Protestant work ethic that insists persons can succeed if they work hard: "A meritocracy is both a goal and what America already is."[20] "Relationism" is the stress white evangelicals place on relationships, both personal relationships with God and with others. The evil of racism, in this perspective, is demonstrated in the bad relationships persons have with one another. "Anti-structuralism" conveys the belief that because equal opportunity is already available to all, white evangelicals resist government intervention as a strategy for addressing racism. To view social problems systemically calls into question free will individualism and challenges the core belief in freedom of opportunity. "For white evangelicals, the 'race problem' is not racial inequality, and it is not systematic, institutional injustice. Rather, white evangelicals view the race problem as (1) prejudiced individuals, resulting in poor relationships and sin, (2) others trying to make it a group or systemic issue when it is not, or (3) a fabrication of the self-interested."[21]

A sample interview with a twenty-seven-year-old white woman named "Debbie" demonstrates this perspective. When asked whether the United States has a race problem, Debbie responded: "I think we make it a problem." She went on to explain that it was a

---

[19] Ibid., 76; the term "cultural tools" they borrow from Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Reivew* 51 (1986): 273–86.

[20] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 110.

[21] Ibid., 116–117.

matter of misinterpretation. "I feel like once in a while, when an argument happens, say between a black guy and a white guy, instead of saying 'Hey, there's two guys having an argument,' we say it's a race issue."[22] Viewing race as a problem "we make," Debbie demonstrates an individualistic interpretation of racism, viewing racism not as systemic but as a problem between individuals, particularly when persons "say it's a race issue," turning a conflict into an issue of race that is otherwise a normal function of miscommunication among individuals. From this perspective, Debbie attributes the "race problem" to other people who "make it a problem."

In keeping with a view of racism as a matter of individual prejudice, many white evangelicals, when asked in a survey, offered solutions to racism that relied upon building better relationships interracially. The most frequently suggested solutions by white evangelicals were getting to know persons of another race and working to racially integrate congregations. While white evangelicals supported the idea of congregational integration, from the face-to-face interviews, Emerson and Smith heard this latter solution conceived of in terms of their churches "already being open to everybody," rather than choosing to attend a non-white congregation.[23]

When Emerson and Smith began asking about statistical racial inequality, they noticed the "irritation" that the very question of racial inequality brought forth from the interviewees, who were otherwise very friendly: "many did not like it when asked this race question [about the reason for continued inequality]. Either they did not agree with the premise of the question (those who denied there was inequality), …or the seemingly

---

[22] Ibid., 69–70.

[23] Ibid., 120.

implicit suggestion that whites might somehow be at fault."[24] The reason why these

interviewed whites resisted the suggestion that racial inequality remained or why whites

should be bothered by the problem at all had to do with the way they interpreted that

inequality. Emerson and Smith explain the views they heard expressed in these

interviews:

> …white evangelicals overwhelmingly hold that both the United States offers equal opportunity to all and that inequality results from lack of individual initiative and noncompetitive practices, such as accepting single-parent homes, having too many children, not stressing education, being too willing to accept welfare, and being unable to move beyond the past. …This helps us understand why our respondents, apart from being irritated at the racial inequality question, were not at all bothered by the racial inequality itself.[25]

By viewing racism through the lens of individualism, white evangelicals blamed

racial inequality on those individuals within racial minority groups who failed to work

sufficiently hard enough to reach equality with whites. Frequently in their interviews,

white evangelicals attributed the continued existence of racial inequality to the lack of

motivation on behalf of individual African Americans, "relational dysfunction" and

lacking responsibility.[26] Another reason given for continued inequality was welfare,

blaming poor racial minorities for becoming dependent upon government welfare, as well

as blaming the government for providing welfare benefits in the first place, creating a

system that makes it easier for people to collect welfare than to go out and work.[27]

Emerson and Smith point out the theological underpinnings of this understanding:

---

[24] Ibid., 101.

[25] Ibid., 110.

[26] Ibid., 101.

[27] Ibid., 104.

"Because systems and programs are viewed as *obviating personal responsibilities and not changing the hearts of individuals*, they are ultimately destructive."[28]

The way white evangelicals interpret society prevents them from being able to see why persons from minority races might complain of racism or lacking equal opportunity or why society does not seem "color-blind" to them. Not only does this interpretive framework hinder whites' ability to analyze current racial inequality, but according to Emerson and Smith, this framework in fact serves to reproduce contemporary racialization. "Because reality is socially constructed, a highly effective way to ensure the perpetuation of a racialized system is simply to deny its existence."[29] Denying the existence of racial inequality enables the processes that foster racial inequality to continue unchecked. Emerson and Smith conclude:

> In the United States there is racial inequality in access to valued resources…Access to valued resources—such as jobs, prestige, wealth, and power—is gained in significant part through social ties. As we have previously discussed, for reasons such as social categorization and comparison, people have positive bias for their ingroups and negative bias for outgroups. These three facts suggest that, other factors being equal, any social structure or process that both increases the saliency of group boundaries and reduces interracial ties necessarily reproduces racial inequality."[30]

That is, whites' continued isolation will continue to provide whites with greater benefits deriving from network ties and access to valued resources. White evangelicals' assessment of the race problem is impacted by their limited social network among other whites, and their limited social networks persist in being limited because of their inability to see the processes of racialization that continue to lead to segregated congregations and

---

[28] Ibid., emphasis in original.

[29] Ibid., 89–90.

[30] Ibid., 161.

neighborhoods. The perpetuation of segregated neighborhoods, congregations, and social networks among persons who already control the greatest amount of resources in society, will lead to the perpetuation of racial inequality in affording greater resources to whites while continuing to disadvantage racial minorities.

The Elusive Definition of Race and Racism

Emerson and Smith, while describing the views of white evangelicals on the issue of racial inequality, lay out a definition of racism that they acknowledge to be different from how it is used by their interviewees. While those they interviewed associated racism with individual acts of discrimination or prejudice based on race, Emerson and Smith defined racism as: "the collective misuse of power that harms another racial group, it is rational, and it includes the justifications provided for racialization."[31] But how is it that Emerson and Smith, both white, have a different definition of racism from the whites that they interviewed? What is the process of developing different interpretations for the same word, and how does the meaning of racism change?

Among the scholars of race who are the most-often cited for their definition of racism are Michael Omi and Howard Winant. They identify the inherent difficulty to naming racism today because of its multiple meanings in society: "The distinct, and contested, meanings of racism which have been advanced over the past three decades have contributed to an overall crisis of meaning for the concept today. Today, the absence of a clear 'common sense' understanding of what racism means has become a significant

---

[31] Ibid., 120.

obstacle to efforts aimed at challenging it."[32] Rather than offering a new "authoritative"

definition, they acknowledge the multiplicity of definitions that exist, and point to the

problem of trying to define racism in universal terms when in fact it differs across

particular cultural milieu. This historical contingency is what makes defining racism so

difficult, since "Racial theory is shaped by actually existing race relations in any given

historical period."[33] Racial theories that purport to explain race and racism across time

often cannot account for the complex ways race relations have developed over time in

relation to historical events.

At the same time, discussing social inequality today *without* mention of race is not

adequate either. Omi and Winant point to the prevalence of theories that attribute the

experiences of different "races" to issues of ethnicity, class or nationality. Omi and

Winant take time to summarize these three alternative paradigms while pointing out their

insufficiencies. The ethnicity paradigm examines racial inequality as a function of

assimilation, modeled after European immigration patterns of assimilation in the United

States, but fails to account for the differences between European and non-European

experiences of assimilation and obstacles to legal citizenship.[34] The class paradigm sees

racial inequality as a result of the political power structure, labor control, and problems

with the market, but fails to account for how non-white persons in middle- and upper-

class spheres continue to experience racial discrimination.[35] The nation paradigm sees

---

[32] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 70.

[33] Ibid., 11.

[34] Ibid., 20–22.

[35] Ibid., 34–35.

race as a function of colonized territories, bearing the impacts of colonization, with the solution being national liberation and cultural autonomy with self-determination, but this theory cannot account for the ways current society is based on race even in a postcolonial society or the differences within groups regarding their preferred identities.[36] Each of these theories fails to account for the ways that race functions across ethnic, class, and national lines; Omi and Winant argue that we must concede that race operates as "an autonomous field of social conflict."[37] Apart from the categories of class, ethnicity, and nationality, race itself functions as a marker in social conflict and in statistical measures of inequality.

At the same time, defining "race" proves difficult. Omi and Winant discuss the current polarities between viewing race as essence or illusion. Because race is socially-constructed and scientists have long discredited "race" as a meaningful biological concept, some suggest it is simply an illusion, though it persists in being a powerful fiction.[38] But instead of considering race an illusion, Omi and Winant suggest that "A more effective starting point is the recognition that despite its uncertainties and contradictions, the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world."[39] That is, we must take race into account when looking at social stratification and inequality, even if it is a social construct. While it is most definitely not an "essence," neither is it an "illusion" that we can simply ignore.

---

[36] Ibid., 46–47.

[37] Ibid., 48–49.

[38] See the PBS documentary by Larry Adelman, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, DVD (San Francisco, Calif.: California Newsreel, 2003).

[39] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

Omi and Winant's argument is that we need a nuanced view of race that allows for its historical contingency, expressing race as: "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle."[40] Their definition of race specifically includes the social and historical context: "*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*. …[where] selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial stratification is always and necessarily a social and historical process."[41] This sociohistorical process "by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed," they call "racial formation."[42]

The complexity and resilience of racial categories in society today calls for a greater awareness and recognition of the nuances of race in everyday social interactions and in larger social structures. Omi and Winant advise:

> So today, more than ever, opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it, that we afford it the recognition it deserves and the subtlety it embodies. By noticing race we can begin to challenge racism, with its ever-more-absurd reduction of human experience to an essence attributed to all without regard for historical or social context. By noticing race, we can challenge the state, the institutions of civil society, and ourselves as individuals to combat the legacy of inequality and injustice inherited from the past. By noticing race we can develop the political insight and mobilization necessary to make the U.S. a more racially just and egalitarian society.[43]

Omi and Winant call for noticing "race," giving it the "recognition" it deserves. It is only by recognizing race that we can begin to see examples of racism.

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., italics in original.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 159.

Contemporary Theories of Racism: "Racial Hegemony" and "Color-Blind Racism"

At the same time, identifying what counts as "racism" amidst this changing social and historical context continues to be highly contested because the racial structure of society has shifted. Omi and Winant explain that while the racism of pre-Civil Rights was most visibly seen in segregation and the racial domination of whites over non-whites across society, more recent forms of racism have taken more subtle forms. They write:

> [T]he racism of today is no longer a virtual monolith…Today, racial hegemony is 'messy.' The complexity of the present situation is the product of a vast historical legacy of structural inequality and invidious racial representation, which has been confronted during the post-World War II period with an opposition more serious and effective than any it had faced before.[44]

The "messiness" of racism remains because of the residual impact of this historical legacy of structural inequality, as well as the strong opposition to racism presented by persons of color as well as whites over the past half-century. But the changes to the forms of racial inequality means that identifying "racism" involves a new set of criteria than that employed in the past.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant:
Racial Formation as Hegemonic Racial Structure

Omi and Winant use the term "hegemony" from the work of Antonio Gramsci, to argue that racism today works because of a form of consent that takes place among social actors, and that this consent works in tandem with coercion to reinforce racial

---

[44] Ibid., 75–76.

structures.[45] Rather than the "racial dictatorship" of the periods of slavery and segregation that ruled racial inequality, racial hegemony relies upon both coercion and consent in order to maintain status-quo arrangements of power and inequality. That is, persons are free to resist and reject the racial order, but by doing so they risk their own ability to advance within that racial order. Persons "consent" to the ways things are, either consciously or unconsciously, in order to try and improve their personal circumstances or those of their family and loved ones.

Noticing a "racial hegemony" involves paying attention to the relationship between the essentialization of certain racial groups and their position within societal structures. While race and racial categories continue to morph over time, (the term "racial formation" connotes this volatility), *racism* functions by essentializing characteristics of a race and attributing them to all members of a group, using this essentialization as justification for the subjugation of one racial group over another.

Omi and Winant use the concept of essentialism as a key interpretive marker for racism. They write: "We define racism as a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race."[46] These two elements, essentialist representations of race and the social structures of domination, are each necessary to understanding the dynamics of racism in society. It is not just a matter of representation, or the identifying of negative stereotypes, but also recognizing the social structures of domination that coincide with negative stereotypes. They emphasize that both essentialist conceptions of race *and* social structures must be

---

[45] Ibid., 185; citing Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Noel Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

[46] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 162,n.2.

analyzed in depictions of racism, because to focus on one without the other cannot account for the prevailing influence of race in society: "efforts to explain racial inequality as a purely social structural phenomenon are unable to account for the origins, patterning, and transformation of racial difference"[47] in terms of cultural representation. These two elements, the social structure and the cultural representation, are often viewed as distinct from one another. To view racism as structural inequality does not account for the ways prejudiced views impact the perpetuation of that structure, and viewing racism as simply a matter of personal prejudices does not account for the structural ramifications that continue to shape the lives of persons according to race. Racism consists in material inequality as well as essentialist cultural representations based on "race."[48]

In line with their critique of essentialism, Omi and Winant challenge the definition of racism offered by antiracist trainers who essentialize all whites as racist. For instance, the classic antiracist training book *White Awareness* gives the following instructions to facilitators regarding the definition of racism:

> It is important to push for the understanding that racism is *prejudice plus power* and therefore people of color cannot be racist against whites in the United States. People of color can be prejudiced against whites but clearly do not have the power as a group to enforce that prejudice. Although participants may not, at this point, totally accept this view or feel comfortable with it, it is important to establish the concept as a working definition. As the course progresses, it will be better understood by participants.[49]

---

[47] Ibid., 56.

[48] Ibid.; See also the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth concerning redistribution and recognition in Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[49] Judy H. Katz, *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2003), 52.

Instead, Omi and Winant propose that "There is nothing inherently white about racism."[50] The authors argue instead that "power" is a relational field and does not exist in static roles nor reside in structural formations.[51] In this image of power, resistance to rule is conceived as a form of power. To say "racism is prejudice plus power" does not account for the multiple ways power can exist and be expressed, indeed, even resisted.[52] The relational and unstable nature of power does not mean that racism is not institutionalized, but it does mean that these institutions can be changed.

Similarly Omi and Winant's argue against essentializing victim status to racial minorities.[53] The danger of such an essentialization, they suggest, is to ignore the possibility that the victimized group contains victimizers. In discussions of the overlapping fields of oppression, be it by gender, class, sexual orientation or otherwise, it is clear that there is no one group who is only ever a "victim" without possibly being implicated in the oppression of another group. Omi and Winant give the example of the 1992 LA riots in which media and presidential candidates focused on the black-white polarity of the conflict, ignoring the fact that the majority of victims were Korean storeowners, and some among the rioters were also white, Korean, Central American and Chicano.[54]

---

[50] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 71.

[51] For other discussions of the pervasiveness of power as it shifts across relational fields, see Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*; See also Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Harvester Press, 1980).

[52] A similar argument looks at the situation of poor whites and the role of the "white trash" trope for maintaining class boundaries. For a specific case study that complicates the essentialization of "white privilege" among working-class whites in Detroit, see Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*.

[53] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 158.

At the same time, Omi and Winant maintain that the "racial dictatorship" of whites over non-whites continues to influence the current racial hegemony. They write: "[A] recognition of the abiding presence of racial dictatorship, we contend, is crucial for the development of a theory of racial formation in the U.S. It is also crucial to the task of relating racial formation to the broader context of political practice, organization, and change."[55] Thus, to speak about racism, we must recognize race, but not essentialize roles of oppressor and oppressed. Recognizing race and the racial formation of dominant structures in society kept in tension with the awareness that power is subtle and fluid, and that resistance to the racial hegemony takes place throughout the social structure.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva:
Color-Blind Racism as Racialized Social Structure

The work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva serves to advance our discussion by providing a history of the theories of racism that have surfaced, showing the diversity of interpretations of racism from the past half-century. Bonilla-Silva's work builds upon previous approaches while highlighting some of the insufficiencies within these other theories. By pointing out these insufficiencies, Bonilla-Silva continues the trajectory of searching for better interpretive frameworks for understanding racism. That is, Bonilla-Silva shows that even in racial theory, some interpretive frameworks are better than others.

---

[54] Ibid., 153.

[55] Ibid., 66.

Bonilla-Silva lists several different approaches: Marxist, institutionalist, internal colonialism, and racial formation.[56] The Marxist perspective sees racism as a tool of the capitalist elite to maintain control of the working classes by dividing them according to races, a perspective that views racism as a function of classism.[57] The institutionalist perspective identifies racism as a stratification of society based on race, so that racism becomes a function of larger societal systems and structures embedded in society.[58] From this perspective comes the often-quoted definition of racism Bonilla-Silva attributes to Mark Chesler: that racism equals prejudice plus power.[59] Chesler's definition of racism is "an ideology of explicit or implicit superiority or advantage of one racial group over another, plus the institutional power to implement that ideology in social operations."[60] From this institutionalist perspective comes the insistence that racism is not a matter of personal prejudice alone, but rather racism is a structure that continues to exist as a result of the continued support of those already in possession of institutional power in order to maintain a racial hierarchy. Bonilla-Silva mentions the critiques of this perspective, in that this dominant perspective is "ensnared in circularity. Racism, which is or can be almost anything, is proven by anything done (or not done) by whites. …Finally, for institutionalists such as Ture and Hamilton, all whites are 'racist' and thus there is little

---

[56] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 23–33.

[57] Ibid., 23–25, citing theorists such as Albert Szymanski, Oliver C. Cox, and Edna Bonacich.

[58] Ibid., 26–28, citing Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton.

[59] Ibid., 26; Citing Chesler, "Contemporary Sociological Theories of Racism," 22.

[60] Chesler, "Contemporary Sociological Theories of Racism," 22.

room for coalition-building with white progressives."[61] This critique of the institutionalist

approach to racism will be especially relevant as we turn to the development of white

racial identity in the following chapter.

The "Internal Colonializationist" approach consists in seeing racism as a

justification for the colonizing of certain groups within America, using racist ideology to

defend such moves as taking over land inhabited by Native Americans and enslaving

African peoples. This perspective roots racism historically in the events leading to and

following the conquest of North America, highlighting particularly the consistent

advantages whites have maintained from the very beginning of this history. The strengths

of this approach include its ability to challenge the view of racism as simply

psychologically rooted in the prejudices of a few, as well as its identification of racism in

the actual material conditions in which persons live, presenting racism as "rational" to

those who benefit from the economic exploitation of others.[62] Bonilla-Silva refers to

Robert Blauner as representative of the Internal Colonialism approach to racism, whose

definition is "a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior in alleged

biological characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and psychically

by a superordinate group."[63]

The "racial formation" perspective builds upon these prior understandings by

showing how the resultant racial ideologies from the colonialization of persons in the

United States and the social structures which persist continue to change and impact the

---

[61] Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 27–28.

[62] Ibid., 29.

[63] Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 84; cited in Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 51, n.30.

meaning of race and racism. Omi and Winant, whose contributions we discussed above, are the representatives of this approach to understanding racism. While these theorists have inspired "most radical writing on race in the 1990s" according to Bonilla-Silva, even this theory has its limitations, which to Bonilla-Silva include their conceptualization of the "racial state" as independent of other factors influencing the hierarchical ordering of society, such as capitalism and patriarchy.[64]

The description of racism as "societal waste" as found in the work of Joe Feagin and Hernán Vera[65] also comes under critique by Bonilla-Silva, who says this perspective presents racism as not "rational," in that whites would not rationally want to be wasteful of the gifts and talents available to them in the lives of non-whites. The claims that racism comes at a cost to whites seems to contradict the perspective that whites continue to benefit materially from the current racial stratification, and so maintaining this racial order continues to be "rational," or in their interests.[66]

From these theories, Bonilla-Silva distinguishes his own, that of a racial social structure he declares is now "color-blind." He uses the term "color-blind" to depict the frequent reference to "not-seeing-color" made by many whites when being charged with racism. It is "color-blind" too in that it typically avoids traditional race language. Instead, Bonilla-Silva argues that racism today is "(1) increasingly covert, (2) embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) void of direct racial terminology, and (4) invisible

---

[64] Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 31.

[65] Joe R. Feagin and Hernan Vera, *White Racism: The Basics* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995).

[66] Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 32–33.

to most whites."[67] The term "structure" refers to "the networks of (interactional) relationships among actors as well as the distributions of socially meaningful characteristics of actors and aggregates of actors."[68] Bonilla-Silva defines society's racial structure today as "the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege."[69] As such, the racial structure comes from a number of different contributing sources—"social relations and practices" that are themselves ambiguous. Bonilla-Silva charges analysts of racism with the responsibility of identifying these "social, economic, political, social control, and ideological mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of racial privilege in a society."[70]

Hand-in-hand with his theory of racial structure is his concept of racial ideology, defined as "the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify…or challenge…the racial status quo." At the same time, racial ideology, or the mental frameworks used to justify or challenge the status quo are not changed simply by education. Nor is racial ideology the only problem. The racial structure remains with real material consequences affording whites certain advantages and extracting from blacks and other persons of color a significant cost. Programs such as Affirmative Action,[71] Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,[72] and the Fair Housing Act[73] have worked

---

[67] Ibid., 48.

[68] Joseph Whitmeyer, "Why Actors Are Integral to Structural Analysis," *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994): 153–165; cited by Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*.

[69] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 9.

[70] Ibid.

[71] *fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/53577.pdf*

to ameliorate some of these costs and ensure a greater degree of fairness in areas of education, employment, and housing. After fifty years since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 put in place some of these programs, there is still a significant gap in the quality of education given among different racial groupings, the pay scale for persons of color compared to that of whites in the same jobs, a difference in employment rates, and still segregation in neighborhoods where homes in white neighborhoods more readily retain their value than homes in mixed or non-white neighborhoods.[74] Thus, the real material impacts of racial inequality remain central to the racialized social structure.

And yet in presenting racial inequality, it is important to identify social practices that continue to contribute to racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva critiques the interpretive framework he sees whites using to account for the contradiction between their support for integration and their opposition to policies that address racial inequalities: "They explain them by appealing to liberalism ('Affirmative action violates the American creed'), blaming minorities for their problems ('Blacks are poor because they lack the proper values'), and by claiming that segregation is the product of the invisible (nonracial) hand of the market ('I live in this white neighborhood, but it has nothing to do with race')."[75] Challenging these interpretive frames involves critiquing the assumptions behind the

---

[72] http://www.eeoc.gov/

[73] http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/FHLaws/yourrights

[74] J.F. Dovidio and S.L. Gaertner, "Affirmative Action, Unintentional Racial Biases, and Intergroup Relations," *Journal of Social Issues*, no. 52 (1996): See; Kochkar, Fry, and Taylor, "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics"; John Logan, *Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in Metropolitan America*. (Providence, RI: Brown University, July 2011), http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report0727.pdf.

[75] Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 138–139.

interpretation, as well as offering alternative interpretive frameworks to take the place of the outdated and inadequate frameworks currently in use.

Interpreting Racism:
The Inheritance of a Racialized Society and Its Justifications

To summarize the aspects of an inadequate interpretive framework for understanding racism: any framework that limits "racism" to individual intentional acts of discrimination, that views racism as the product of ignorance or irrationality, that relies on outdated reference points for judging racism such as enforced segregation, that assumes a shared understanding of racism, and that views racism as purely ideological rather than material in its consequences.

Drawing from the theories of Omi and Winant and the genealogy of racial theories by Bonilla-Silva, I argue that a more adequate interpretive framework consists of: awareness of the conflicting meanings intended by the word "racism," an understanding of the United States as a "racialized society" in which whites continue to benefit from their position in the racial hierarchy, an understanding of the "rational" nature of whites' defense of the status quo since maintaining the racial hierarchy serves their interests, and that continued racial inequality remains as a result of the racialization of society.

Racism as an ideology or set of beliefs is founded on an already-existing racialized society, an ideology used to justify and make sense of the racial hierarchy. Racial stereotypes are based on actual racial interactions that result from the racialized structure, and are used to further justify that structure. Persons in the dominant racial category benefit from this structure, and maintaining the racial stratification serves their

interests. Because the dominant racial group receives material, economic, and psychological benefits from their position in the racial structure, it is "rational" that they seek to preserve their dominance. The continuation of racial inequality is a consequence of the continuation of a particular racial structure, a "natural" outcome to the process of racialization. This perspective challenges the notion that education can end racism, because racism is not simply a matter of beliefs. While rooted in historical events and the development of race-based oppression, this understanding of racism focuses not on the past but on the present realities of racialized existence and inequality.

Interpreting Preachers' Interpretive Frameworks for Understanding Racism

The understanding of racism expressed in the sermons earlier in the chapter are examples of the "color-blind" interpretive framework, described in the work of Bonilla-Silva. Both sermon samples fail to mention racism specifically, and by doing so, both preachers engage in "color-blind" speech about race. That is, the sermon makes no mention of the responsibilities of whites for engaging in work that addresses discrimination, indeed "whites" is not a racial descriptor used at all in the sermon. Hence, this preacher's sermon is "void of direct racial terminology."

In these two sermon samples, any reference to racism points externally. In the texts examined above, racism comes across as something done by extremists outside the congregation and not something the preacher or congregants participate in themselves. In both sermons, the preachers assume that they and their congregations are united against racism, and that they all share the same understanding of what racism entails. In both

sermons, racism is a settled issue. It is not something that presents any obvious obstacle to shared agreement.

By failing to name race specifically, by avoiding direct racial speech that identifies whites as benefiting from the "unholy alliance between race and poverty," the first sermon sample leaves open the possibility that such an unholy alliance could be the fault of persons of that particular race. Moving quickly from the ways this unholy alliance is "seen" in unemployment and incarceration, to declaring that "we need to stop the violence that is threatening our children," the preacher risks associating those who suffer from this "unholy alliance" with the "violence that is threatening our children," an essentialist script that associates black men with criminality. In the "Aryan Nations" reference in sermon sample two, the preacher presents racism as an identifiable evil associated only with particular fringe groups. By failing to present a more complex and subtle picture of racism, the preacher in the second sample missed an opportunity to invite the congregation into examining their participation in the racial social structure. Without being aware of the interpretive frameworks at work in talking about race and racism, white preachers not only limit the potential for understanding among their congregants, but they risk perpetuating racial inequality as well.

Highlighting the insufficiencies of these preachers' interpretive frameworks does not imply that either preacher is a bad person or a "racist" in the outdated sense of the word. Bonilla-Silva cautions against this kind of finger-pointing: "Doing ideological analysis about race then is not a matter of finding 'racists' but rather an attempt to uncover the frames, racetalk, and storylines that help lubricate a racial order at a particular historical juncture. My main analytical tasks, therefore, are determining

whether actors share social representations about the world and analyzing how they use them to explain a host of racial matters."[76] Now that we have analyzed the social representations of white evangelicals through the work of Emerson and Smith, and have come back to the sample sermons of white preachers to evaluate their interpretive frameworks, I reiterate Bonilla-Silva's words that the intent is not to find "racists." In fact, it is this labeling and self-reflexivity regarding racism that also serves to hinder whites from approaching the subject of race. The following chapter addresses the challenge to self-understanding that these new interpretive frameworks have for white preachers and their congregants, and how understanding the psychological processes for coming to see oneself as having a "positive white racial identity" can be beneficial in enabling whites to remain engaged in combating racism today.

---

[76] Ibid., 138.

Chapter 3: Interpreting the (Im)Materialities of White Racial Identity

"Claims about how whiteness functions in society sometimes obscure equally important questions about how different individuals understand, relate to, and negotiate whiteness as an identity and social position…we must gain a better understanding of the creative and varied responses of individuals as they interact with each other and with social institutions."[1]

"My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served."[2]

"Mom, are we white?" (Evelyn, Age 3)
"Yes, dear."
"But you just said it was white people who were mean to them…"[3]

Discussing racism involves speaking *as though race matters* and affects persons' lives, even though many whites do not consider themselves in racialized terms. Because race is not biological, and because it has served as a source of injustice, many whites prefer to speak in terms of color-blindness, not mentioning race in their descriptions of themselves or others.[4] From the previous chapter, the definition of race provided by Omi and Winant was "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly

---

[1] Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 12.

[2] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 90.

[3] My daughter, Evelyn, on the eve of Martin Luther King Day 2014, after learning about segregation and the Civil Rights Struggle. The questions reflect the complexity of racial identity and the difficulty of whites understanding ourselves as white within a history of racial discrimination.

[4] Michael I. Norton et al., "Color Blindness and Interracial Interaction: Playing the Political Correctness Game," *Psychological Science* 17, no. 11 (November 2006): 949–953.

being transformed by political struggle,"[5] a definition that points to the inherent difficulty of talking about race because of its many meanings within political struggle.

This dissertation argues that white preachers' revised interpretations of racism and white racial identity require initial analysis into already existing interpretive frameworks. Thus, we examined the changing nature of "racism" as a concept, looking at interpretive frameworks from interviews with individuals as well as racial theorists. But how do white preachers interpret themselves racially? And how can this hinder or enable their ability to preach against racism? This chapter examines the interpretation of whiteness as a racial identity in order to argue for a revised interpretive framework that recognizes the salience of whiteness within a racialized social structure.

I have argued that white preachers' reticence to preach about race involves not only an inadequate understanding of racism, but also an insufficient white racial identity. The initial questions this chapter will answer then are: 1) what is an insufficient white racial identity? 2) why is this racial identity insufficient? and 3) what is an alternative white racial identity that might be more sufficient in enabling white preachers to preach about racism?

The form of white racial identity I label "insufficient" for the purposes of this dissertation is one that denies the salience of one's whiteness. This is often expressed through a desire to be color-blind and move "beyond race," and so white persons avoid thinking in racial terms. This is exemplified in the interviews Korie Edwards had with white congregants from interracial churches in which whites seldom expressed their

---

[5]Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

identity using racial terminology.[6] Edwards noticed how the whites she interviewed were

much less likely to identify in racial terms than blacks in the same congregation. When

she interviewed the African Americans in the congregation, asking them how they would

identify themselves, one of the first ways they described themselves was in terms of race.

Whites, on the other hand, seldom mentioned "white" as a marker of their identity.

Edwards writes:

> Race was not a salient identity for whites at Crosstown. Unlike most African
> American attendees, who drew upon concepts of structural disadvantage to
> explain what it means for them to be black, most whites did not relate what it
> means to be white to the analogous concept of structural advantage. Some were
> able to stumble upon concepts of privilege and cultural normativity. Yet others
> limited their explanations of whiteness to cultural and ancestral traits. And still
> others didn't believe that being white had any real meaning for them at all. There
> were a couple of whites who had evidently contemplated how race affects their
> lives before I prompted them. They had recognized that they belong to a socially
> and culturally dominant group and that this group membership affords them
> privileges that others do not experience. Nonetheless, for nearly all of the white
> attendees with whom I spoke, race was not a salient identity. This supports other
> work which has shown that not only is race not a salient identity for white
> Americans, but that whites are unaware of how it affects their lives.[7]

The reason this lack of attention to whiteness as a marker of identity is

"insufficient," is because it does not take into account the material realities of living in a

racialized social structure, an inherited system of racism that advantages whites to the

disadvantage of persons of color. Whites benefit from the racial social structure by

having better access to quality education, greater opportunity for affordable housing in

---

[6] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*.

[7] Ibid., 98; some of the sources Edwards cites include Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Feagin and Vera, *White Racism*; Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

desirable neighborhoods, and better access to health care and higher-paying jobs.[8] George

Lipsitz terms this the "Possessive Investment in Whiteness," with "possessive" referring

to the material and economic benefits accruing to whites, and "investment" referring to a

commitment to maintaining these benefits over time.[9] Lipsitz uses "whiteness" to refer to

the system of white supremacy that structures society based on race. Whiteness gives

whites the opportunity to accumulate assets at a greater rate than non-whites, based on

discriminatory lending practices and real estate agents steering non-whites away from

predominantly-white neighborhoods, as well as the inherited wealth from home

ownership passed down through generations.[10] Less access to affordable housing in

optimum conditions means that many people of color live in conditions that can be

hazardous to their health.[11] Lipsitz relates the lack of access for persons of color with the

opposite benefit given to whites: greater access to healthier living conditions, more

desirable neighborhoods, better schools, etc.

Scholars of racial theory argue that whites receive these benefits from society's

racialization, without having to see themselves as racial beings.[12] One of the scholars

frequently cited is Ruth Frankenberg, who claims most white people do not see their

---

[8] See studies in Douglas S Massey and Nancy A Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010); Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*.

[9] George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment In Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, Revised and Expanded (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), vii–viii.

[10] Ibid., 105–108.

[11] Ibid., 110.

[12] Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*; Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in *Re-Visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture and Gender in Clinical Practice*, ed. Monica McGoldrick (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 147–152; Katz, *White Awareness*.

whiteness, and that it functions as an invisible set of cultural practices: "Whiteness, as a

set of normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitely excludes

and those to whom it does violence. Those who are securely housed within its borders

usually do not examine it."[13] Theorists such as Frankenberg argue that helping whites to

see themselves as racialized and as the beneficiaries of an unjust racial system will

convince whites of their need to work against racism.[14] Frankenberg goes to say that

beyond simply being "invisible," whiteness as a set of practices does have a substance, a

content that can be examined: "whiteness *does* have content inasmuch as it generates

norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even

ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself. Thus whiteness needs to be examined

and historicized."[15] In the pursuit of examining and historicizing whiteness, a field of

"critical whiteness studies" has emerged, drawing from the work of scholars in fields

such as sociology, anthropology, literature, American studies, and others.[16]

At the same time, these theorists acknowledge that whites are not monolithic in

their receipt of the benefits of whiteness. There are other mitigating factors that limit

individual whites' access to such "white privilege." The degree to which one experiences

---

[13]Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 228–229.

[14] Yet some researchers say that an increase in perception of one's efficacy in challenging racial inequality is actually a greater predictor of decreased racism than heightened white privilege awareness. See Tracie L. Stewart et al., "White Privilege Awareness and Efficacy to Reduce Racial Inequality Improve White Americans' Attitudes Toward African Americans," *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 1 (March 2012): 11–27.

[15] Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 231 italics in original.

[16] For an example, see the edited volumes: Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997); Rasmussen et al., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*.

oneself as "privileged" impacts how one responds to discussions of white privilege.[17]

Other forces of social stratification based on gender, sexuality, disability, and class

continue to be significant features determining the life chances of individuals. White

persons from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are more likely to see themselves as

privileged and to feel guilty about this unearned advantage, but white persons from

lower-class backgrounds are likely to see such assertions of their privileged status as

adding "insult to class injury."[18] That is, because working class whites see themselves as

considerably disadvantaged in terms of class, charges that they are just as privileged as

middle- and upper-class whites clashes with their identity as working-class who have

"had to work for everything."[19] In light of the different ways persons receive advantages

and disadvantages, "whites" are not all alike in assured levels of social, psychological,

economic, and other material security. Because whites are not all alike in their social

position within this racialized social setting, paying attention to location and cultural

specificity helps root white racial identity discussions in the real histories of persons and

communities.

    To claim that white preachers currently have an insufficient white racial identity, I

must also offer an alternative framework. I will present three methodological approaches

for understanding white racial identity: 1) a psychological model of white racial identity

---

[17] Nyla R. Branscombe, Michael T. Schmitt, and Kristin Schiffhauer, "Racial Attitudes in Response to Thoughts of White Privilege," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2007): 203–215.

[18] Elizabeth M. Bounds, "Gaps and Flashpoints: Untangling Race and Class," in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 137.

[19] See the discourse analysis of conversations between working-class whites in a Detroit-area bar, in Lindquist, *A Place to Stand*.

development that presents a normative progression of stages towards an anti-racist white racial identity; 2) an ethnographic, explicitly non-prescriptive methodology of studying white identity from published studies of white racial identity based on differences of social locations that present a challenge to the normativity of the psychological model, and 3) a hermeneutic approach to understanding white racial identity that mediates between a normative and non-normative approach by pointing back to the psychological model as a possible hermeneutic horizon rather than a prescriptive stance.

White Racial Identity Development: A Psychological Stage Model

One's racial identity is not solely a matter of cognition or attitudes; it is also uniquely psychological, involving one's own feelings and psychological responses to discussions of one's own "race." This psychological element is also temporal, in that it involves examining one's own history and influences regarding race, and continues as a process of racial formation over time. To discuss racism among whites, one is not just engaging with theoretical abstractions of the word "racism" but rather simultaneously engaging whites' personal emotions and life narratives involved in their psychological responses to understanding racism. This personal and temporal element is expressed in the phrase "racial identity development," a phrase created to help communicate the gradual nature of the self-understanding of one's identity in a racialized society.

The history of psychological scholarship on "racial identity development" as such began in the 1960's, looking primarily at the racial understandings of African Americans. It began as the "Nigresence Racial Identity" development approach, which recognized a separate process at work than the individual's self-actualization, a process of racial

identity based on reactions to living in an oppressive society.[20] That is, psychologists

began noticing that "self-actualization" for most African Americans in therapy required

grappling with the racist social context in which one lived. African Americans in such

settings focused on racial dynamics at work in society and the ways such oppression

impacted their self-understandings and mental health. Those that did not come to

counseling with a positive view of one's race had less positive views of oneself overall.

Drawing on these observations, this counseling approach began to take seriously how

racial identity develops over time by an individual through his or her own perception of

affiliation with others from a similar racial background in a wider social context of racial

discrimination, and how one's views of race impact one's self-esteem and mental

health.[21]

By the end of the 1970s, theorists began to shift away from the American notion

of the "melting pot" as psychologists noted assimilation of African-Americans into white

culture was detrimental to their well-being. These psychologists began forming several

variations of similar models of black racial identity development, describing both the

stages themselves and how an individual moves through the various stages of racial

identity development.[22] Soon, theories of white racial development emerged, correlating

racism with more primitive stages of white racial identity development.[23] These theorists

argued that racism negatively impacted whites' positive identity development, and that

---

[20]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 17–19.

[21]Ibid., 3.

[22]For a chart of the differences among these theories, see ibid., 11–16.

[23]Ibid., 11–16, 51–52.

whites also needed a framework for understanding how they can move beyond their racist socialization.[24]

Developmental psychologist Janet Helms is one of several theorists who developed a stage model for white racial identity development. Each stage represents a distinct "worldview," which Helms defined as "cognitive templates that people use to organize (especially racial) information about themselves, other people, and institutions."[25] These various worldviews or stages affect how persons relate to persons of other races, and the more advanced worldviews lead to a greater sense of well-being and a more active sense of racial transcendence.[26]

Helms states, "The greater the extent that racism exists and is denied, the less possible it is to develop a positive White identity."[27] Hence, according to Helms, racism and positive white identity development are inversely related. The acknowledgment that racism persists is the beginning of developing a different white racial identity. Helms cites J.M. Jones for providing the definition of racism she uses, which include three types of racism:

> (a) individual, that is, personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors designed to convince oneself of the superiority of Whites and the inferiority of non-White racial groups; (b) institutional, meaning social policies, laws, and regulations whose purpose is to maintain the economic and social advantages of Whites over non-Whites; and (c) cultural, that is, societal beliefs and customs that promote the

---

[24] Perhaps the earliest theorist to focus on white racial identity development was Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

[25] Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 19; Helms later revised her terms, moving away from stages to statuses or worldviews, conveying that movement was neither inevitable nor successional. See Helms, "An Update of Helms's White and People of Color Racial Identity Models."

[26] Helms also allows that persons may enter the cycle at different stages and can revert to earlier stages. Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 32.

[27] Ibid., 49.

assumption that the products of White culture (e.g., language, traditions, appearance) are superior to those of non-White cultures.[28]

Helms argues that the process of developing a positive white racial identity consists in both "abandoning racism" and developing a positive sense of what it means to be white.[29] Helms states, "he or she must accept his or her own Whiteness, the cultural implications of being White, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another."[30] Within this concise statement Helms offers a brief summary of the development of a positive white racial identity.[31] First, in order to abandon racism, a white person must realize that being white has made a difference in his or her life. Second, a white person must begin to conceive of oneself positively as a white racialized person, a positive view that does not rely on false notions of superiority over persons of other races. For whites, the stages of racial identity development described by Helms include: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. The first three correlate with the process of "abandoning racism," while the second three involve the defining of a nonracist white identity.[32]

---

[28]Ibid.; citing James M. Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1972).

[29] Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 49.

[30] Ibid.

[31]It should be noted that Helms was the first among developmental psychologists of racial identity to suggest that whites can have a positive non-racist identity. See Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 127.

[32]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 56.

Stage One: Contact

The process of developing a positive white racial identity, according to Helms, begins in the "contact" stage in which a white person has little awareness of their racial identity. In much of the United States, the racial homogeneity of neighborhoods and schools makes it easy for many whites to grow up knowing few if any persons of color, feeling racially "normal," and thinking that race is "about other people."[33] Thus, the Contact stage for many whites may be a persistent attitude through much of their life.[34]

Robert Carter, a student of Helms', has documented the subsequent research on the levels of racial identity development, and reports characteristics of persons found to exhibit attitudes and behaviors associated with the different levels. In the contact stage, for instance, a person typically denied the importance of race and racial issues and is unaware of oneself as a racialized person. Additionally, he or she may lack the ability to develop close and meaningful relationships with other persons, regardless of race.[35] Yet another study showed that persons with high levels of Contact attitudes "felt more comfortable with Blacks than those with less of these attitudes."[36] Ironically, it seems that as whites go through different developmental stages, they because less comfortable with African Americans as they adjust to new ways of thinking about themselves as white.

---

[33] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, 100.

[34] Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 55–58.

[35] Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 150.

[36] Ibid., 150–151, citing the 1988 study by Claney and Parker.

Stage Two: Disintegration

Stage two of the racial identity formation for whites, "Disintegration," involves losing one's positive view of oneself by recognizing the implications of being a member of an oppressive racial group. As whites begin learning about the realities of racism, they will enter the stage of Disintegration when they experience the cognitive dissonance between how they perceive the state of race relations and the reality of racial discrimination as experienced by people of color. Learning about racial injustice and perceiving the unearned benefits and privileges accredited to whites can create significant inner conflict for the white person. This process causes painful emotions such as disorientation and confusion.[37]

Carter adds to Helms' description by suggesting persons move into the Disintegration stage "as a result of confusing experiences with Blacks or negative reactions by Whites to interracial associations. In this status, a person realizes and acknowledges that he or she is White."[38] Carter cites studies that link the Disintegration stage with attitudes such as denial of discrimination against African Americans, feeling uncomfortable with non-whites in work settings, and belief in reverse discrimination.[39] Thus, while in the Contact stage, whites may feel more comfortable with African Americans, once they begin to process their own white racial identity, they begin to experience discomfort. It is not until whites move into other levels of racial identity that

---

[37]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 58–60.

[38]Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 151.

[39]Ibid., 152.

they return to a sense of comfort around persons of color, a comfort not dependent upon denying the significance of race.

Stage Three: Reintegration

Helms defines the third stage as Reintegration. The white person responds to the disorienting sense of guilt experienced in the Disintegration stage by "reintegrating" their understanding of whiteness. As a move out of Disintegration, this stage describes the mindset of adapting to the status quo. In order to adjust to this new discomfort, the white person may try one of several options to ameliorate this cognitive dissonance: "changing behavior; changing an environmental belief, or developing new beliefs."[40] Examples of these responses include avoiding future interactions with persons of color if at all possible, or trying to learn from Blacks or other whites why it is that racism is not really a white problem. Reintegration moves a person from the confusion of Disintegration into a psychological state of rigidity, with strong anti-Black sentiments.[41] The perceived superiority of whites over non-whites is maintained, and the white person alleviates the cognitive dissonance by turning negative emotions away from the self and onto non-whites. The white person responds by further distancing him or herself from persons of color, or could actively express such hostility through racial discrimination or racist jokes. This movement from Disintegration to Reintegration is inevitable due to the inability of persons to remain in a state of high anxiety.[42] While clearly Reintegration is

---

[40]Helms, 59.

[41]Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 153.

[42]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 60.

not a positive move, Helms argues it is important to recognize as part of the developmental process. For the white person who at this stage begins to question society's definition of whiteness and its concomitant assumption of superiority, Reintegration may be a temporary stage before he begins to redefine whiteness for himself, at which point he enters the fourth stage of Pseudo-Independence.[43]

Stage Four: Pseudo-Independent

The Pseudo-Independent stage involves white persons accepting they are white and understanding the political and societal advantages held by whites.[44] This stage also involves the redefinition of whiteness for the individual; he or she now assumes a "pseudo-independent" stance or worldview from that of the traditional construct of what it means to be white. The individual becomes aware of the primary role whites play in perpetuating racism, including his or her own participation in and benefits received from a racist system. At this stage however, the individual is most likely to intellectualize this criticism; he or she is not yet ready to have real relationships with persons of color. The white person in the Pseudo-Independent stage may still wonder whether the reason for the existence of racism can be found in the perceived negative traits of non-white cultures, basing these judgments on the self-referential paradigm of white cultural supremacy. Hence, while the Pseudo-Independent white individual may feel convicted of

---

[43]Ibid., 60–61.

[44]Many use the term "white privilege" to describe these kinds of benefits. See McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."

the immorality of racism emotionally and intellectually, behaviorally she may still exhibit symptoms of a racist system.[45]

For many, however, guilt simply leaves them immobilized, which may leave them indefinitely in the Reintegration stage. For others, they feel the impulse to unify and reconcile, but soon experience the burnout of the seemingly insurmountable task ahead of them and the confusion over what racial reconciliation might look like.[46]

Stage Five: Immersion/Emersion

The fifth stage, Immersion/Emersion, involves the white individual taking time to learn more about the realities of racism, as well as the history of whites who have supported the cause of civil liberties for all persons. Immersing oneself in stories about racism, learning about the people who have fought against it, and studying the wealth of available scholarship from persons of color kept outside the dominant mainstream of educational curriculum, enables the white person to imagine herself part of the effort as well, identifying as one of the many allies in the struggle to end racism as well as other forms of oppression.[47] Rather than focusing on helping persons of color, the white person seeks to promote awareness among other whites, "emerging" from one's studies to share

---

[45]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 61–62.

[46]Beverly and Barbara Smith saw this phenomenon in the reactions of white women to learning about oppression. These women seemed to experience a "click" of recognition that injustice exists, and they pursued that injustice with a strong sense of optimism. The authors contrasted this with the experiences of women of color, who know oppression "from day one." See Beverly Smith and Barbara Smith, "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 113–127.

[47]For a discussion on the use of "ally," see Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom," 16.

the stories of the anti-racist white allies who have gone on before.[48] Learning a series of

narratives of white anti-racists provides the white person with more options for viewing

one's own narrative.[49]

Stage Six: Autonomy

The final stage or status reflects attitudes that are "autonomous" from the cultural

expectations of whiteness. That is, the white person is able to define what being white

means for himself, and no longer fears discussions of race or racism. Helms describes

some of the characteristics of this level:

> Internalizing, nurturing, and applying the new definition of Whiteness evolved in
> the earlier stages are major goals of the Autonomy stage. In this stage, the person
> no longer feels a need to oppress, idealize, or denigrate people on the basis of
> group membership characteristics such as race because race no longer symbolizes
> threat. Since he or she no longer reacts out of rigid world views, it is possible for
> him or her to abandon cultural and institutional racism as well as personal racism.
> . . .the Autonomous person actively seek[s] opportunities to learn from other
> cultural groups. One also finds him or her actively becoming increasingly aware
> of how other forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, ageism) are related to racism and
> acting to eliminate them as well. . . . It is a process wherein the person is
> continually open to new information and new ways of thinking about racial and
> cultural variables.[50]

The stage is summarized by being perpetually open to learning more about

persons of color and to fighting systems of oppression in the areas in which each

individual can exert influence. The person "no longer feels a need to oppress, idealize, or

---

[48]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 62.

[49]This stage echoes the encouragement of Joe Feagin that children learn the history of racial
oppression in this country, not just the history of the oppressors but also of those that resisted the
oppression, including other whites. See Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New
York, London: Routledge, 2006), 312; For additional stories of contemporary white antiracist activists, see
Becky Thompson, *A Promise and A Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 2001).

[50]Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 65–66.

denigrate…because race no longer symbolizes threat." These attitudes towards one's racial identity serve as a goal for working towards in one's own racial identity development. The development of racial identity is a lifelong process, but having a vision of mature attitudes towards racial identity helps the individual to accept the attitudes one currently experiences while knowing there is always room for healthy growth.[51] This level represents a stance of acceptance and flexibility, with a willingness to learn while also having the ability to internally direct oneself amidst social pressures.[52]

Both Helms and Carter are writing for an audience of counselors, advising that counselors be aware of the different kinds of racial identity development levels that both they and their clients might currently exhibit. Carter emphasizes the importance of assessing one's own level of racial identity for becoming a competent clinical counselor. For those who are unsure how to proceed with the development of racial identity, he advocates learning more about issues pertaining to racial and ethnic groups, "such as learning about the nature and history of race relations in the United States."[53] This psychological model for white racial identity development offers a normative account of how a white person might move from one stage or status to a more mature and less racist racial identity. Helms' model shows setbacks as necessarily part of the process, and that multiple statuses or stages could be present at any one time.

Beverly Daniel Tatum has demonstrated the effectiveness of introducing students to the stages of racial identity development in prolonging their active engagement in the

---

[51]Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 124.

[52]Ibid., 155.

[53]Ibid., 113.

uncomfortable discussions on racism throughout a semester course on the Psychology of Racism.[54] Tatum has written about her experiences teaching courses on the Psychology of Race to groups of students from different races at the colleges where she has previously taught.[55] Noticing the variety of reactions among White students and students of color, and witnessing a progression through various developmental stages, Tatum wrote about the racial identity development theory of Janet Helms as seen in the classroom.[56] As part of her course on the psychology of racism, Tatum introduced her students to Helms' stages of racial identity development at the onset of their discussions on racism. As Tatum discovered for her students, understanding these stages can contribute to students' positive engagement with the process of racial identity development. By outlining the stages as presented by Helms, Tatum enabled her students to accept the emotions that come with the various stages as they identify themselves in the process. Tatum uses the students' journal responses to demonstrate that awareness of the developmental stages supported students in staying engaged throughout the duration of the semester, rather than withdrawing from the course as they were inclined, as reported by their journal self-reflections.[57] Tatum observed:

> The emotional responses that students have to talking and learning about racism are quite predictable and relate to their own racial identity development. Unfortunately, students…consider their own guilt, shame and embarrassment or

---

[54] Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom."

[55] Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, 6–7.

[56] Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom," 1.

[57] For an example of a journal entry, see ibid., 15.

anger an uncomfortable experience that they alone are having. Informing students at the beginning of the semester that these feelings may be part of the learning process is ethically necessary (in the sense of informed consent), and helps to normalize the students' experience. Knowing in advance that a desire to withdraw from classroom discussion or not to complete assignments is a common response helps students to remain engaged. …sharing the model of racial identity development with students gives them a useful framework for understanding each other's processes as well as their own.[58]

Seeing the progression of the stages towards a positive white racial identity can help whites remain engaged in the process even when they encounter negative emotional reactions. Recognizing they are not alone in their feelings may help them remain engaged, as seen in Tatum's students after learning about racial identity development. Tatum also advocates the following strategies when teaching about racism in the classroom: create a safe climate, encourage opportunities for self-generated knowledge about racism, name the problem by explaining the complexity of racial identity development, and empowering persons so that they can be agents of change.[59] Laying out the stages of white racial identity formation can help persons anticipate their own reactions to the process, and can help them trust that guilty feelings are not the end goal.

What is left unsaid in Helms' model or in Carter's supplemental description of Helms' model is the social location of the white person experiencing these various stages. For instance, what is not taken into account in these descriptions is how white persons who find themselves in the intersections of multiple forms of discrimination—class, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and so forth—how these persons negotiate their

---

[58]Ibid., 19.

[59]Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, 18–21.

white racial identity formation with these other forms of social stratification in which they are not dominant or privileged. For instance, while Tatum demonstrated the effectiveness of this theory in helping college students stay engaged, Tatum was interacting with relatively privileged persons who had access to higher education. Persons without such access may not find this model as compelling, particularly the "disintegration" stage that seems to require that whites feel badly about themselves. To suggest all whites go through this stage is to make certain assumptions about their privileged status. Poorer whites who have earlier interracial experiences than wealthier whites, who have already developed a "positive" view of themselves as white, may reject this method because of its class assumptions.

In the following section, we will be drawing from an ethnographic methodology to examine just such possibilities. The studies below serve as examples of ethnographic approaches to understanding white racial identity, particularly from working-class whites. These studies will further illuminate the diverse experiences of whites' racial formation, as well as point us towards the need for a less prescriptive approach to discussing race among whites who may not all experience themselves as privileged. I will bring these ethnographic insights into conversation with the psychological stage model in my third discussion of white racial identity as a hermeneutic horizon. That is, the vision of moving towards an anti-racist positive white racial identity is maintained from the psychological stage model, while the ethnographic approach will bring to the foreground the differences of starting locations, in which the influences of social location to one's self-understanding are seen as impacting one's hermeneutic horizon as a white person.

White Subjects: An Ethnographic Approach to White Racial Identity[60]

Anthropologist John Hartigan, Jr. has advocated an "ethnographic" approach to

understanding white racial identity that examines the influence of location (social and

physical) on whites' racial self-understanding.[61] Hartigan's work has focused on whites

in Detroit, where they make up thirteen percent of the population in that particular city.[62]

Hartigan charges antiracism[63] with oversimplifying the white racial experience and

failing to attend to the cultural specificity of white racial formation. He writes: "The

model of whiteness most widely promoted by antiracists posits a generic white subject

both privileged and unconscious of the extent or operation of the privilege. This model

perhaps pertains to the majority of white Americans. But its explanatory power

diminishes… and its sweeping assertions are seriously challenged by the process of

racialization that whites are subject to in Detroit."[64] Hartigan advocates a closer attention

---

[60] The ethnographic approaches here focus on working-class whites as a unique site of exploring "whiteness" as a challenge to traditional antiracist discourse. There are other forms of oppression that intersect with whiteness, such as religion (Jews were seen as "non-white" during the *Shoah* and continued to face oppression in the United States), as well as gender and sexual orientation, but for the sake of focusing the discussion on the insights of an ethnographic method I have deliberately limited this section to class. One reason for this limitation is that while white congregations are typically homogenous racially, they are typically diverse in terms of class, unlike many other social groups in society.

[61] Hartigan's works focusing on inner-city Detroit whites include: John Hartigan, Jr., "Locating White Detroit," in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 180–213; John Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); John Hartigan, Jr., "'White Devils' Talk Back: What Antiracists Can Learn from Whites in Detroit," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*.

[62] Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*, 241.

[63] He defines antiracism: "a coordinated and sustained means of both pursuing critical pedagogy and politically engaging the institutions that racially structure society. ...efforts by social researchers to turn their scholarly training toward the broad goal of eliminating racism. Antiracism as a political practice increasingly also encompasses efforts to generate critical knowledge about whiteness and its operations, while also challenging, destabilizing, and short-circuiting the social routines by which white dominance is reproduced." Ibid., 231.

to the interpretive situations in which whites navigate their racial identities, looking to their ambiguous settings as potentially transformative spaces where racial thinking is continually emerging.

Hartigan points to the possibility of better understanding these interpretive frameworks as a path towards changing racial socialization, but that these changes or interventions can only occur once one has listened to and studied the ambiguity present in white persons' account of their racial formation. Thus, the goal of ethnographic approaches to studying racial identity is to attend to the ambiguities present in white racial identity. He writes: "Ambiguity…opens a view to the unfolding interpretive work of subjects. This is critical both because we need to understand how racial significance materializes in distinct settings and because it is whites' interpretations of race that those who want to short-circuit the reproduction of whiteness need to engage."[65] Attending to these ambiguities is contrasted with what Hartigan likens to Gadamer's[66] "hermeneutics of suspicion," in which antiracists examine white racial speech with an intentional eye for discerning the underlying racism present beneath their claims of denying their racism.[67] He asserts: "This powerful interpretive stance has the capacity to continually discern racist kernals in whites' actions and comments, but I think that it will increasingly obscure more than it reveals about the novel range of situations in which whites today are

---

[64] Ibid., 241.

[65] Ibid., 256.

[66] Referencing Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

[67] Hartigan specifically critiques the work of Alice McIntyre, *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*.

confronting racial matters."[68] To echo again the sentiment captured in the quote by

Bonilla-Silva in the previous chapter, the study of whiteness does not have to be a search

for "racists." Rather, this alternative method of attending to the ambiguities present in

whites' racial formation can open up new possibilities for the success of antiracism in its

challenge to white supremacy. Again, Hartigan states: "If antiracists can draw more

widely from ethnographic findings and techniques, and if they adopt an orientation

toward the interpretive work of their subjects, anti-racism's critical engagements with the

reproduction of white identity can perhaps be more powerful."[69]

Negotiations of Whiteness in a Detroit Working-Class Bar

To demonstrate the potential for such an ethnographic approach, I will present the

findings of several anthropologists who have focused on whiteness in order to explore its

complexities. Julie Lindquist studied the ethnography of a white working-class bar, and

in the process, provided a complex picture of the racial identities of whites in the

working-class.[70] Lindquist introduces her work with autobiographical material,

describing her own working-class background. Lindquist described her own mother as a

white working-class woman committed to anti-racism, who refused to talk with the

neighbors once she realized the conversations inevitably turned to racial jokes.[71] In

describing her working-class neighborhood as racist, Lindquist represents working-class

---

[68] Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*, 250.

[69] Ibid., 232.

[70] Lindquist, *A Place to Stand*.

[71] Ibid., 12.

whites as racists, yet in her depiction of her mother, she shows how even within communities where racism is widely-shared, there can be individuals with antiracist values and commitments. This brief example of resistance demonstrates the complexity of class position and anti-racism; working-class whites are not all racists, as other biographical portraits of anti-racist activists have shown.[72] In her research, Lindquist goes further than presenting a more complex picture of working-class whites, she shows the internal logic to the conflicts surrounding racism, which typically has to do with demonstrating a rejection of upper-class elitism and jockeying for position within one's social group.

Lindquist presents the perspectives of the "Smokehousers," the group of working-class whites who were known as "regulars" to this particular bar where she completed her ethnographic research. Regarding their definition of racism: "…Smokehousers in general refute racism as a structural system of dominance on grounds that they themselves—as working whites—enjoy no more authority and privilege than blacks do."[73] For the Smokehousers, their understanding of racism emerges out of their class location and lack of access to certain privileges the middle-class whites enjoy. Lindquist observes: "Smokehousers see themselves as entitled to resources by virtue of their membership in a racial category that is linked to their perception that their class status offers them no such entitlements."[74]

---

[72] See Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, eds., *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1996); Thompson, *A Promise and A Way of Life*.

[73] Lindquist, *A Place to Stand*, 85.

[74] Ibid., 89.

Their discussions of "racism" often can be read through the lens of class

suspicion, in which the Smokehousers saw themselves as embodying a certain stereotype

that elite whites had of poorer whites. Thus, Lindquist was cognizant of the class

dynamics, knowing that comments she made would be considered laced with classist

elitism, because the Smokehousers knew Lindquist's education made her more privileged

than they who had little access to higher education. Lindquist remarks on her hesitancy to

comment on the racist language she heard in the bar, "for fear that these questions would

be heard, given the antiracist feelings I have voiced at the Smokehouse, as motivated by a

desire to 'prove' Smokehousers' racism and thereby proclaim my own class

superiority."[75] Lindquist reflects, echoing the concerns of Hartigan: "The claiming or

disclaiming of explicit racist discourse is itself a powerful class signifier and marks one

way that discussions of race can be read as conversations about class operating

incognito."[76]

At the same time, the racial dynamics of the actual location of the "Smokehouse"

add further complexity, given that the building served as a "stop" on the underground

railroad, helping escaped slaves find refuge on their way to freedom. Yet despite that

history, it was clearly still a cite of racial discrimination against African Americans:

Lindquist emphasizes that it was a *white* working class bar—the only blacks seen in the

Smokehouse were the kitchen staff, all of whom had to stay in the kitchen and were not

allowed in the dining room or other highly-visible areas of the bar.[77] Thus, while

---

[75] Ibid., 85.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 45.

claiming an oppressed status due to their working-class and ethnic backgrounds, the managers and clients of the Smokehouse perpetuated an oppressive system on African Americans who worked there, while still justifying their insistence that non-white persons served as a threat to their own financial security. Lindquist writes: "Whereas ethnicity locates class identity in an imagined past, race places it in an insecure future. Smokehousers speak of racial distinctions in terms of competition between races for social and economic resources."[78]

The insight that Lindquist gleans, however, is not the inherent racism that can be detected in the conversations at the Smokehouse, but rather the transformative potential of the conversations as practices of identity formation. Lindquist sees the performative acts of argument, or conversations that take on agonistic qualities, are actually structuring acts that help individuals at the Smokehouse assert themselves into the group as well as to help the group continually form its identity. Conversations Lindquist observed usually focus on a set number of "topoi," but which can change gradually as members introduce different ideas. For these working-class whites who feel disempowered politically because of their class positions, these conversations provide them a place to contribute to "the public construction of knowledge."[79] Ideas aimed at the level of theory, the "what-if", are able to be argued and contested, and the dissent made openly provides a space for persons to disagree and to change positions.[80] "To describe persuasion at the Smokehouse, then, one must speak of a gradual reconfiguration of the topoi available for

---

[78] Ibid., 85.

[79] Ibid., 171.

[80] Ibid., 174.

cultural intervention."[81] This analysis into the rhetorical practices and social functions of argument among whites in a working-class bar in Detriot provides insight into the possibilities for where racial identity can be transformed. By attending to the ways language and identity shift in these arguments, Lindquist has highlighted the "what-if" as a location for transformation. Simply calling out the Smokehousers' racism or pointing out the racial segregation among highly-visible employees versus kitchen staff, would only have re-inscribed the class dynamics that mark Lindquist as "superior" in her more privileged position due to educational attainment. Lindquist's analysis demonstrates the importance of listening to the ambiguities present in whites' racial formation with the hopes that this insight can enable antiracists to be more effective in shifting the discourse of whiteness.

White Privilege or Stigma: The Influence of Place on Working-Class Whites' Identity

Another recent ethnographic study that sheds light on white racial identity formation is the work of Monica McDermott.[82] In her study of the white racial identities of working-class whites in Atlanta and Boston, McDermott noted that "whiteness" can mean different things, even among persons of the same class with the same level of interracial interactions. McDermott did her field work while working as a store clerk in two different cities, but at an intentional location within each city that positioned her in poorer neighborhoods where whites were racial minorities. Her goal was to witness working-class whites in each of these cities who had greater opportunities for interracial interactions than wealthier whites who lived in more segregated neighborhoods.

---

[81] Ibid., 177.

[82] McDermott, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*.

McDermott observed that whites in the Atlanta study expressed a sense of shame about their white racial identity. She writes:

> In lower-income, racially-mixed areas, white skin can serve as a liability in the job market, especially for low-skill jobs. An implicit assumption is that whites living or working in the area are damaged in some way; if they were 'real' white people, they would have moved up and out by now. If one is white and seeking a low-wage job, the assumption is often that one has substance-abuse or other personal problems. …The stereotype's pervasiveness is one of the reasons that working-class whites respond so angrily to claims for equal opportunity or compensation for past discrimination on behalf of blacks. To these whites the payoff for light skin is not self-evident, and the racism they exhibit is of a defensive sort...[83]

McDermott's experiment in Atlanta took place in a neighborhood bordering a predominantly black neighborhood in Atlanta's south side, where she worked as a gas station store clerk. Whites who served in managerial positions had suspicions about whites, and thus expressed the ideas in McDermott's quote above. African American store clerks who worked with her also expressed a sense of suspicion regarding the white people who entered the store. McDermott states: "The low number of readily available low-skill jobs coupled with the negative treatment received by many whites in the area supported a perception that whites were being discriminated against in the hiring process in favor of blacks. …involved the sense that an unspoken 'whites need not apply' policy was in effect for low-skill jobs in the area."[84] For the whites in the Atlanta study, being working-class and living in a poorer area of the city meant that they had "failed" as white people, and that they should be living in the areas where wealthier whites lived.

On the other hand, the working-class whites in the neighborhood in Boston that also bordered a predominantly black neighborhood maintained a sense of superiority over

---

[83] Ibid., 38–39.

[84] Ibid., 42.

nonwhites, despite their class background. Whites in the Boston city, who had a stronger

sense of ethnic identity than the Southern whites, had a greater sense of pride in being

white, with whiteness serving as a "wage" that paid psychological benefits, if not

material benefits.[85] She observed:

> in a low-income, racially mixed area with a tight labor market and a history of
> working-class consciousness, whiteness is more likely to function as a mark of
> superiority than of inferiority. Social distancing and a dismissive air toward racial
> minorities on the part of whites are more typical…White reactions to accusations
> of racism or prejudice are just as vociferous as in the neighborhoods without the
> history of class consciousness, but whites are more likely to claim that blacks are
> less deserving because they haven't worked as hard…[86]

At the same time, while those in the Boston study individually conveyed a sense of

superiority, they viewed other whites in the neighborhood as "damaged goods."[87] Two of

the white male coworkers in the store discouraged her from trying to date any of the

white "locals" because they lacked ambition or they were "messed up" in some way.[88]

In Boston, whites expressed more openly a dismissive and judgmental view towards

blacks in their neighborhood, and whites stated a desire to be at a greater distance

physically from blacks in the neighborhood. "In Greenfield,[89] white racial identity

confers certain perceived rights and privileges: rights to white schools, white

neighborhoods, and white jobs. While these expectations are largely invisible to middle-

---

[85] McDermott references Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*.

[86] McDermott, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*, 39.

[87] Ibid., 50.

[88] Ibid.

[89] This is the fictitious name of the neighborhood in Boston where she worked as a convenience
store clerk. Likewise, the area of Atlanta where she worked at gas station convenience store she named
"Holton," another fictitious name.

and upper-class whites, the working class whites in Greenfield are constantly confronted with threats to their accustomed level of segregation and privilege."[90] McDermott attributes this to the higher percentage of working-class whites in this area who saw themselves first as part of an ethnic group with a unique history and narrative of overcoming discrimination. McDermott writes: "In neighborhoods with strong ethnic consciousness and high levels of unionization, working-class whites are likely to defend their turf and view themselves as morally superior to African Americans."[91] Whites in this area also were more likely to be part of a union, and through their unionization these whites would build a greater solidarity with others in their class level, though this meant largely the white working class since unions remain predominantly white.

McDermott's study of working-class whites in Atlanta and Boston point out two insights for the study of white racial identity. The first echoes the work of Hartigan and Lindquist, that "the meanings attached to white racial identity are not fixed but context-dependent."[92] From McDermott's study, we see that some working-class whites experience whiteness as a stigma (in the case of the Atlanta study), but others can view it as a "tenuous privilege that must be defended,"[93] as seen in the Boston study. The contextual nature of white racial identity means that understanding the processes of racial formation involves attention to the location-specific forces shaping white racialization.

---

[90] McDermott, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*, 54.

[91] Ibid., 55.

[92] Ibid., 149.

[93] Ibid., 55.

The second insight from McDermott's study is the way experiences of working-class whites can illumine the larger racial social system that privileges certain forms of whiteness over all other forms of non-whiteness. These whites in McDermott's Atlanta study experienced a form of discrimination based on their skin color, in which the white employers thought local whites to be on drugs or have other issues preventing them from being reliable employees. The discrimination of these whites sheds light on the larger paradigm of racial expectations and stereotypes. McDermott writes: "While white skin privilege may have been turned on its head in this neighborhood, the negative stereotypes of poor and working-class whites who live among blacks have everything to do with the overarching racist paradigm governing urban America. Dead-end jobs, substandard housing, and high crime are associated with black neighborhoods and black people."[94] The examination of the attitudes towards working-class whites in this poorer area highlights the racism of a social structure that assumes only African Americans belong in such impoverished conditions, and that whites found there are there because of some deficiency. By calling attention to paradox, McDermott challenges the "normalcy" of racial segregation, in which whites are seen as "belonging" to safer and more affluent neighborhoods.

White Horizons: A Hermeneutic Approach to White Racial Identity

At the beginning of the previous section in which I analyzed the contributions of two ethnographic studies of white identity from the perspective of working-class whites, the work of John Hartigan pointed us towards the importance of a hermeneutic approach

---

[94] Ibid., 43.

to studying whiteness. Hartigan contrasts what he termed an "ethnographic hermeneutic" with the "hermeneutic of suspicion" that he critiqued in other antiracist studies of white identity. He expresses more fully what he intends by an "ethnographic hermeneutic":

> I regard the hermeneutic stance ethnographers assume to be oriented toward understanding (1) how specific situations countervail or complicate abstract generalizations; (2) that ambiguities are not to be rationalized away: they indicate both the unfinished process of cultural constructions and moments when researchers' assumptions grind against the categorical orientation of their subject; and (3) that the interpretive work of subjects—what criteria or means of prioritizing interests are evident, and what counts as 'good' interpretation—is important to understand, not to simply 'correct' or 'deconstruct.' The criteria people employ in making sense of ambiguous situations provide a glimpse of the forces that economically and politically shape the places they inhabit, and these criteria reflect people's perceptions of the meanings of these forces. The hermeneutic disposition of ethnographers is geared towards grasping how place both shapes and reflects the interpretive work people pursue in everyday situations. And it is this kind of interpretive work that must be understood about 'the waitress stories,' [from Ruth Frankenberg] whether regarded as points of intervention in the reproduction of racism or as sources of knowledge production about whiteness…active efforts to make sense of situations that may or may not reproduce categorical racial judgment."[95]

Thus, the "ethnographic hermeneutic" advanced by Hartigan and displayed in the studies discussed above by Lindquist and McDermott, focus specifically on the specific situations of white racialization, attend to the contradictions and ambiguities within such situations, and observe the interpretive frameworks in use by white racial subjects in order to see the influence of place on white racial identity and to try and "make sense" of such situations.

While I have described above the insights that these perspectives bring to our analysis of white racial identity, I argue that an alternative white racial identity

---

[95] Hartigan, Jr., *Odd Tribes*, 247; referencing Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*.

necessarily involves a hermeneutic approach *that points towards a normative goal of antiracism*. That is, an ethnographic approach, even an "ethnographic hermeneutic," must contribute to a vision for an alternative white racial identity that is not static, nor limited to the particular influences of social and historical forces involved in the specific situations influencing whites' racial identity. One's social location of experiencing other forms of oppression does not justify the oppression of others. A different kind of hermeneutics needs to be involved in order to search for the possibilities of transformation that can be found in moving whites towards an antiracist white identity.

Returning to the psychological model of racial identity development, I suggest that the stages present in Helms' model can offer a hermeneutic method of understanding white racial identity, and that this hermeneutic can be informed by the insights of ethnographic research as discussed above. As seen in McDermott's Boston study, the working-class whites had a "positive white identity," but this positive white identity was based on an ethnic history and unionized working-class identity, and contrasted with the negative views of African Americans in the neighborhood. Indeed, working towards a "positive" white racial identity that is not based on notions of racial superiority can also support entrenched racism among whites who already have a strong sense of a superior racial identity to the non-whites they frequently encounter in their neighborhood.

While Helms' white racial identity development model has been critiqued,[96] I argue that it serves a significant function in the analysis of racial identity and the process of "working through" racism. There have been other analytic typologies of white racial

---

[96] John T. Behrens and Wayne Rowe, "Measuring White Racial Identity: A Reply to Helms (1997)," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 44, no. 1 (n.d.): 17, accessed January 19, 2014.

identity, such as defensive versus progressive[97] and "hegemonic whiteness,"[98] but these typologies account only for the current expression of a white person's racial identity without accounting for or pointing towards ways that such a racial identity can form and change over time. The benefits of Helms' model include providing a larger continuum of possible attitudes towards' white racial identity, offering a normative vision for what "healthy" white racial identity might look like without presumed racist superiority, and by explaining not only the thoughts concerning racial identity but also the emotional reactions present in discussions of race and racial identity. These benefits enable the discussion of racial identity to open up new possible interpretive frameworks for whites as they discuss racism, and knowledge of such stages may enable some whites to stay engaged in the discussion more readily than without such knowledge.

The insights provided by a non-normative ethnographic approach include viewing whiteness as a social construct dependent upon other factors of social location, in which other forms of discrimination mitigate the "privileges" most often associated with whiteness. And yet while "white privilege" can be offset by class marginalization and other forms of oppression, even in interracial communities of socially marginalized persons, whiteness can emerge as a dominating source of stratification within the community.[99] Whiteness comes across as elusive, as something that provides material benefits to some whites but not to others, as something that some whites experience as an

---

[97] Paul R. Croll, "Modeling Determinants of White Racial Identity: Results from a New National Survey," *Social Forces* 86, no. 2 (December 2007): 613–642.

[98] Matthew W. Hughey, "The (dis)similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of 'Hegemonic Whiteness,'" *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 33, no. 8 (September 2010): 1289–1309.

[99] Jane Ward, "White Normativity: The Cultural Dimensions of Whiteness in a Racially Diverse LGBT Organization," *Sociological Perspectives* 51, no. 3 (2008): 563–586.

important part of their identity, and yet other whites see as unimportant to their sense of identity. Having a strong sense of one's white racial identity can lead some whites to present a greater degree of racism, whereas it can also lead other whites to challenge racial inequality and see themselves as "anti-racist."[100]

There are better understandings of white racial identity than others; it is better to work against racism than to support white supremacy. Thus, a normative approach to moving whites towards a preferred white racial identity is necessary for helping white preachers be able to operate out of the best possible interpretive framework for preaching about racism. At the same time, changing someone's interpretive framework is not easily accomplished. It is in some ways mysterious. How interpretive frameworks shift is related to how persons interpret themselves. Below, I will draw from the psychological model of racial identity development *as a hermeneutic approach* to understanding white racial identity, putting the psychological theory in conversation with hermeneutics of Linda Martín Alcoff.

The Hermeneutic Horizons of White Racial Identity

In the psychological models of racial identity development, there is both implicit and explicit the assumption that how persons interpret their racial identity influences how they interpret themselves within society. Carter states that "a person's worldview, through the lens of racial identity, has implications for how he or she processes information, forms perceptions, understands behavior, and selects and understands what is important. …racial and cultural assumptions have powerful influences on how a person

---

[100] Croll, "Modeling Determinants of White Racial Identity"; Hughey, "The (dis)similarities of White Racial Identities."

interprets himself or herself and others."[101] Additionally, racial identity levels influence

how one interacts with others from similar and different racial backgrounds.[102] Thus, how

we view our own racial identity impacts the ways we interpret the world. The emphasis

placed on interpretation here again reinforces the significance of the interpretative lens

for understanding and processing the significance of race today.

In her seminal work, *Visible Identities*, Linda Martín Alcoff advocates for the

significance of "visible identities" as hermeneutic positions or horizons of interpretation.

She explains:

> We might, then, more insightfully define identities as positioned or located lived
> experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in
> relation to historical experience and historical narratives. Given this view, one
> might hold that when I am identified, it is my horizon of agency that is identified.
> Thus, identities are not lived as discrete and stable set of interests, but as a site
> from which one must engage in the process of meaning-making and thus from
> which one is open to the world. The hermeneutic insight is that the self operates in
> a situated plane, always culturally located with great specificity even as it is open
> onto an indeterminate future and a reinterpretable past not of its own creation. The
> self carries with it always this horizon as a specific location, with substantive
> content—as, for example, a specifiable relation to the Holocaust, to slavery, to the
> *encuentro*, and so on—but whose content only exists in interpretation and in
> constant motion.[103]

Persons' identities are not "essences" that determine their beliefs and interpretations, but

they do act as locations from which to interpret particular histories and life events. Their

own interpretations of such histories can change, as can their own interpretations of

themselves and the world, but their social location acts as a horizon from which they

view these histories and this world. Alcoff states that this does not mean that our social

---

[101]Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy*, 113.

[102]Ibid., 133–135.

[103] Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 42–43.

location determines our interpretation, but that they indicate "horizons from which certain

aspects or layers of reality can be made visible. In stratified societies, differently

identified individuals do not always have the same access to points of view or perceptual

planes of observation. Two individuals may participate in the same event but have

perceptual access to different aspects of that event."[104] These identities then function as a

"hermeneutic rationality," a horizon through which our rationality functions. But our

identities do not necessarily fix our horizons—our horizons can be broadened: "change

and critique are possible."[105] Such change takes place not through a total rejection of

one's identity, but rather through being able to see that one's identity can be included in a

different set of possible narratives.[106] Alcoff writes: "We are not caught ineluctably

within the prison house of our current cultural traditions. But on the hermeneutic account,

change does not happen through a complete disengagement from all value commitments

and framing assumptions but through the ability to imagine life under the terms of more

than one set."[107] Alcoff incorporates the idea of narrative in depicting the nature of these

horizons that can change, as narratives create new possibilities and present new horizons

through which we view our world. She cites the work of Stuart Hall in declaring:

"identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position

ourselves within the narratives of the past."[108]

---

[104] Ibid., 43.

[105] Ibid., 56.

[106] Alcoff challenges the idea that whites can be "traitors" to whiteness, in that they will also maintain their location as whites in a socialized society. She references Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, eds., *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[107] Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 56.

In applying this hermeneutic approach to the study of whiteness, Alcoff argues that the social positioning of whites within a racialized social structure prevents whites from having automatic access to certain realities. Again, the identity of whiteness does not determine one's horizon, as studies of different social markers within whiteness have shown, but it does limit some of the things whites can accurately interpret regarding race relations, even among those who seek to be antiracist. She writes: "White support for antiracism is often similarly flawed; riven with supremacist pretensions and an extension at times of the colonizer's privilege to decide the true, the just, and the culturally valuable."[109] Even in the pursuit of antiracist white identities, whites' hermeneutic framework prevents them from seeing themselves always from the perspective of non-whites. Yet Alcoff does not dismiss white antiracists, arguing in line with her insistence that hermeneutic horizons can change, saying that "we need also to affirm that *some* of the time, in *some* respects, whites empathize and identify with non-whites, abhor the social injustice of white supremacy, and are willing to make significant sacrifices towards the eradication of white privilege."[110]

A hermeneutic approach to white racial identity views racial identity as a way of interpreting the world, and that there are ways of interpreting the racialization of society in such a way as to work against the history of racial discrimination. Such a hermeneutic holds in tension the history of white racist discrimination to which whites are heirs, as well as the history of white antiracist activists who have worked for racial equality. The

---

[108] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225; cited in Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 114.

[109] Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 206.

[110] Ibid.

hermeneutic approach to white identity "requires an ever-present acknowledgement of the history and legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community."[111] The work of an antiracist hermeneutic for whites would include viewing situations both through the history of whites' role in racist discrimination and injustice, as well as the history of those whites who have fought for racial equality and justice for all. Alcoff concludes: "This, then, is the challenge: to transform the basis of collective self-respect from global, racial vanguardism to a dedicated commitment to end racism."[112] Similar to the final phase in the psychological model of racial identity, there is this goal of having self-respect formed not at the expense of others but rather derived from one's commitment to the flourishing of all. Alcoff presents an image of a "positive" racial identity or a "basis of collective self-respect" as incorporating a commitment to end racism. Thus, a hermeneutic approach has a normative function in moving whites from one interpretive framework for how they understand themselves in the world, to another that views themselves as part of a history of white supremacy that has included whites who have struggled against racism. This vision echoes the psychological model of racial identity moving towards "autonomy," in having immersed oneself in the history of white antiracist activity in order to see oneself as part of a larger struggle of whites against racism.

---

[111] Ibid., 223.

[112] Ibid., 222–223.

Without using the word "hermeneutic," Ruth Frankenberg describes this interpretive approach to white identity by describing particular interpretations of the historical conditions for white racialization. "That which is most 'given' about whiteness (and indeed about the relations of race in general) is the materiality of its history—the impossibility of undoing what has already taken place."[113] As an example, Frankenberg cites the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadelupe Hidalgo as the historical background for one of the white women's experiences of interracial interactions with non-white Mexicans across the Californian border. In each situation of racial interactions, "It would, in fact, be possible to recover the histories embedded in every incident recounted in each narrative."[114] Learning the history of racial encounters and the development of a racialized social structure helps individuals to interpret interracial encounters in the present.

I have argued here that the hermeneutic approach to understanding white racial identity is more sufficient for enabling white preachers to preach about race, not only for understanding their own racial identity as salient today but also for understanding the varying perspectives of white racial identity found in any congregation. Such a hermeneutic approach borrows from the psychological model an awareness of different movements of identity formation, the emotional reactions inherent to struggling with one's white racial identity within a history of racism, and the image of possible horizons whites can experience as they work towards becoming antiracist. A hermeneutic approach also attends to the specificities of whites' locations, not prescribing a set of

---

[113] Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 238.

[114] Ibid.

beliefs but opening up vistas of possibilities for other narratives to be considered. A hermeneutic approach does not expect all whites to go through the same psychological "stages," but it assumes that being white, being racialized in the United States context, means having a certain position for interpreting the world. This position can prevent whites from interpreting reality in a way that leads to greater equality and well-being for all, which is the ultimate goal. Thus, attending to interpretive frames and working through white racial identity as a hermeneutic in need of repair can help white preachers understand their own limited vision. At the same time, white preachers do not need to assume that their congregants are all oblivious to their privilege—because white identity does not necessarily translate to privileges for all whites—and so must do the ethnographic work of studying their own white congregants to examine how their particular social location influences their understanding of what it means to be white. In learning more about the different experiences white congregants have had in their racial formation, white preachers can draw from the hermeneutical possibilities opened up by the psychological model to discern possible interventions in helping shift a congregation's horizon towards a commitment to antiracism.

While this hermeneutic approach to white racial identity is necessary for white preachers, there is still more that white preachers need in order to preach about racism in white congregations. Because of the vocation of white preachers within the Christian tradition, any understanding of a hermeneutic horizon needs to acknowledge the horizon of the God before whom all our horizons are made known. White Christians interpret themselves through a number of different lenses, but as people of faith, Christians believe

that there is a God whose truth and goodness undergirds all our attempts at becoming "good." Thus, a hermeneutic approach must incorporate a theological component to account for the ways racism impacts white's hermeneutic horizons. Why is it that whites cannot simply share the horizons of non-whites? Why does racial discrimination continue despite whites' efforts at becoming non-racist? To account for these realities and limits to whites' hermeneutic horizons, the following chapter examines racism as "sin," the theological term for what separates humans from God.

Chapter 4: Naming Racism As Sin: The Sins of Sin-Talk and the Need for Grace

"If America has the courage to confront the great sin and ongoing legacy of white supremacy with repentance and reparation there is hope 'beyond tragedy.'"[1]

"…Christianity marks the spot where, if noble dream joins hands with God-inspired hope and presses with great impatience against the insularities of life, for example, national, cultural, ethnic, economic, sexual, and racial, seeking the deeper ground upon which to seed a new way of belonging and living together, then we will find together not simply a new ground, not simply a new seed, but a life already prepared and offered to us."[2]

This dissertation argues that white preachers are reticent to preach about racism because they lack an adequate framework for understanding racism today, they have an insufficient understanding of white racial identity, and they lack a theological vocabulary for describing the spiritual impact of racism on their white congregants. The previous two chapters have argued for a hermeneutic approach to understanding racism and white racial identity. While recognizing the term "racism" continues to shift over time, I have defined current racism in terms of an inherited racialized social structure that benefits whites to the disadvantage of persons of color, as well as the justifications for such a social structure. For white racial identity, I have likewise identified the heterogeneity of understandings of whiteness among whites, arguing for an understanding of white racial identity as a hermeneutic position from which whites interpret themselves and the world, a position that takes into account each individual's own context as well as the limitations

---

[1] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011), 166.

[2] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, Connecticutt: Yale University Press, 2010), 11.

to whites' horizon due to their hermeneutic position as *whites* in the United States context.

In the second chapter, I discussed the work *Divided by Faith* and the study of white evangelicals' response to racism. Emerson and Smith's analysis argues that the particularly individualistic approach that white evangelicals take to understanding racism prevents them from being able to see the larger problem of racism that cannot be eradicated on an individual-by-individual basis. Emerson and Smith seek to move "beyond the simplistic explanation that white evangelicals, to protect their advantages, simply lie or distort the truth. We cannot conclude that their expressed views are merely smoke screens to divert attention from what they know to be true. Instead, we have argued, the cultural tools and intergroup isolation of evangelicals lead them to construct reality so as to individualize and minimize the problem."[3] The "cultural tools" or the hermeneutic frameworks used by white evangelicals limit their analysis of the problem of racism as needing only an individualistic approach. While Emerson and Smith fault white evangelicals for their limited view, they also express the sentiment that white evangelicals are at least "laudable for bringing in necessary components missing from most policy-oriented, structural solutions—personal responsibility, repentance and forgiveness, interpersonal interaction, the acknowledgment of…the moral and spiritual aspects of the problem"[4] While white evangelicals do not tend to see the structural components of racism, they have emphasized the spiritual components that most political responses to racism might miss.

---

[3]Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 89.

[4] Ibid., 132.

Naming racism as "sin" is a task unique to persons of faith. Government policy

makers must rely on more secular forms of reasoning and are unable to label as "sin"

racism or any other form of injustice. To call racism sin is to demarcate it as beyond

legislative redress; outlawing racism does not require repentance or forgiveness, but

calling racism *sin* does require such responses. The recent arguments discussing sin in

contemporary society seek to demonstrate that sin continues to have social significance,

and that sins resulting in social injustice also have spiritual significance.[5] Christian

preachers have an opportunity to help congregations understand the depths of the

problem of racism by drawing from the language of sin-talk to point Christians to their

need for grace.

Yet naming the spiritual components of racism can also serve to re-inscribe

racism if not done well. Certain ways of framing the sin of racism can actually perpetuate

racist stereotypes as well as minimize the problem of racism. The first part of this chapter

looks at the critique of Stephen Ray's *Do No Harm*[6] as he names the "sins of sin-talk"

especially in regards to talking about racism as sin. Following this critique, I present a

sermon preached by a white preacher to a predominantly white congregation from 2013

that demonstrates the many pit-falls Ray highlights. For instance, this sermon, though it

aims to preach about "justice" and does so by several inferences to race, it does a

---

[5] Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960): 100–112; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); Alistair I. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David H. Kelsey, "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin?," *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 169–178; David Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); For a summary of the traditional doctrine of original sin and current theological debates concerning sin, see Ian McFarland, "The Doctrine of Sin and the Fall," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140–159.

[6] Stephen G. Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

disservice to discussions of racism because it minimizes the problem, it perpetuates a

pathologized view of persons treated unjustly, and it presents a paternalizing portrait of

whites responding to non-whites. Thus, even in well-meaning attempts to preach about

issues of social justice, white preachers can fail to adequately present the sin of racism

because of the way their words contribute to a racist discourse. In Ray's words: "when

[theologians'] depiction of social sin fails to include an accurate account of the social

forces producing it, the more important social and material relations that are

fundamentally unjust are left unchallenged. When this happens, social sin-talk…covers

up exactly what needs to be contested."[7] This is not to discourage white preachers from

preaching on racism; this dissertation aims at overcoming reticence to preach about race.

Rather, a critique of this kind is necessary to demonstrate that while white preachers can

address racism through a revised hermeneutic, the risk of sermons perpetuating racism

cautions white preachers against overconfidence.

The latter half of the chapter seeks to offer an alternative theological vocabulary

for naming racism as sin, drawing from several theologians to argue for an understanding

of racism as sin through the metaphors of idolatry, estrangement, and bondage. While

these metaphors are not new, they have been infused with new meaning through the

reflections of theologians such as George Kelsey, J. Kameron Carter, and M. Shawn

Copeland whose hermeneutic frameworks include racism as a central theological

problem. These authors contribute to my argument by demonstrating how a proper

hermeneutic for viewing racism as sin can enable white preachers to identify racism and

hopefully avoid reproducing racist discourse in their sermons. Finally, the focus on "sin"

---

[7] Ibid., 2.

in this chapter serves to remind white preachers that the message they preach is "good news" because it points to humanity's need for a Savior, and Christians believe that this Savior has already been given as a gift to the world to redeem the world.

The "Sins of Sin-Talk": Stephen G. Ray and the Racism in Theological Discourse

While naming racism as "sin" is a crucial contribution preachers can offer to secular discussions of racism, such naming can also serve to reproduce negative stereotypes of those already impacted by racist discrimination. Stephen G. Ray, Jr. has described the problematic ways sin has been formulated by several theologians, arguing that the way we define and talk about sin can potentially do as much harm as it can good. Ray makes this argument on the basis of the interpretive function of "sin" in making sense of our world. What counts as sin, who counts as "sinners," all depends upon the interpretation given to such acts and individuals. Ray states: "sin, and our discourse about it, has everything to do with how we see the world and one another. What we name as sin, how we respond to it, and the culpability that we ascribe to the sinner correlates strongly with the interpretive framework through which we see those persons and their actions."[8] Ray's analysis draws upon critical discourse theory to show how the contexts in which theologians' works have been formulated have informed (or *de*formed) an understanding of sin that "depend on and play off of popular but nonetheless deeply problematic and oppressive discursive economies."[9]

Ray examines the work of several theologians and describes how their work inadvertently perpetuates the injustice they seek to decry. The interpretive context of

---

[8] Ibid., xiv.

[9] Ibid., xvii.

theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, despite his legacy of work supporting economic

and racial justice, was such that these theologians' interpretations of sin were impacted

negatively by racial bias.[10] Ray calls special attention to Niebuhr's depiction of the

"Negro" and the "Negro's cultural backwardness" in several passages that reinscribe the

racism he sought to deplore. Ray exposes the harmful dualisms present in Neibuhr's

analysis of sinful social structures, a dualism of how "*the Negro*'s" culture differs from

that of white Americans, a culture that is "backwards" as a result of the oppression

African Americans have experienced. Niebuhr condemned the racism that he saw white

Americans expressing towards African Americans, yet in his description of the

oppressed, he uses terms such as "backwards" and empathizes with white Southern

parents who see such culture as a "threat" to the education of their own children. Ray

draws attention to a section of Niebuhr's work in which he describes the:

> cultural backwardness which was occasioned by, and politically sanctioned the
> oppression experienced by the Negro…The other source of prejudice is the fear of
> the Negro's cultural backwardness. If we are right in defining this backwardness
> as cultural rather than biological, it will of course be cured in time by precisely
> those equal opportunities of education which the constitution and the Court seek
> to impose upon the community. But this fact does not immediately help anxious
> mothers and fathers in those counties of the South which regard a common
> education as a threat to the cultural adequacy of their children's education.[11]

Ray shows Niebuhr describing the situation of African Americans as being such

that they are not only victims of sin done to them by an oppressive dynamic of racism,

---

[10] Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barack Obama among others have expressed their admiration for Niebuhr and his work. Niebuhr's work cautioned against the liberal optimism of the social gospel, arguing instead that the immorality of society as a whole required a change in laws rather than a change in individuals' hearts alone. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

[11] Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm*, 61–62; quoting Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly; Essays on the Religious and Secular Dimensions of Modern Life* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1958), 81.

but they are also the "victims" of their "backward" cultural background in which they are formed as a result of racial discrimination and segregation. In this dynamic, Niebuhr presents African Americans as not capable of transcending anything more than this backward culture. The problem with Niebuhr's logic is that "it renders the sins of marginalized persons as having a distinctly different character from the sins of persons they assume to be the normative human subject. …he discusses *the Negro's* status as a sinner as being qualitatively different from that of white Americans."[12] In other words, Niebuhr's analysis of the sinful situation and the oppression of African Americans suggests that the only hope for the oppressed is in their ability to transcend their cultural background and to join white Americans' culture. Niebuhr seems to suggest that while whites need to transcend the evils of racist discrimination, African Americans' redemption includes transcending the evils of their backwards and deficient culture. Ray writes:

> To be fair to Niebuhr, he does recognize the role that racial oppression— segregation, marginalization, and dehumanization—played in the creation of *the Negro community* of his day. What he failed to recognize, however, is that the mythic backward *Negro culture* existed only as a reductive communal figure constructed to explain and legitimate the oppression of a particular community. Put plainly, the…*Negro community* that Niebuhr refers to on numerous occasions was a false category in the rhetoric of commentators such as himself; it had no true referent in concrete reality.[13]

Ray points out that Niebuhr was not speaking of actual communities of African Americans when describing their "culture." He was presenting a monolithic and stereotypic image that had been presented by others as a way of justifying the status quo

---

[12] Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm*, 69.

[13] Ibid., 66; Ray has quoted a passage from Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly*, 78–79.

of racial discrimination and segregation. Thus, the way Niebuhr described the context of the "sin" of racism was itself an act of "sinning" against this same group, perpetuating a false image that further justified claims of white superiority and white normativity.[14]

Ray also quotes from the work of Gunnar Myrdal whose book Niebuhr reviewed in 1944.[15] Myrdal's representation of the "Negro problem" was one of many that facilitated this negative portrayal of African Americans. Under a subheading of "The Negro Community as a Pathological Form of an American Community," Myrdal writes of the myriad forms of "social pathology" that affect the "Negro community," negative effects he attributes to the pressures of "caste."[16] Myrdal calls Negro culture a "distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture," linking this culture to numerous social ills including "the high Negro crime rate" and "personality difficulties."[17] Myrdal's book presents "the Negro problem" by depicting African Americans in an essentialized way that is damaging and paternalistic. The rhetoric is such that the reader is invited both to condemn the culture—its various forms of "social pathology"—and to feel sorry or pity for those who participate in such culture since "for the most part…[these aspects were] created by the social caste pressures." We see these same dynamics at work in Niebuhr's earlier comment quoted above, describing the "backwards" nature of African American culture, while also calling attention to the

---

[14] This false monolithic image is an example of the essentialism that defines racism as depicted in the work of Omi and Winant, discussed in the previous chapter.

[15] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Review of An American Dilemma by Gunnar Myrdal," *Christianity and Society* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1944): 42.

[16] Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm*, 63; quoting Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), 929–930.

[17] Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm*, 63; citing Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 929–930.

"oppression experienced by the Negro." Ray's analysis of this problematic aspect of Niebuhr's work calls our attention to the way the "sin-talk" surrounding racism can in fact perpetuate the sin itself by coupling a condemnation of "racism" with a racist paternalism, a subtle way of condemning the cultural differences of non-white groups while evoking pity for their oppressed condition.

In preaching about racism, one of the "sins" of "sin-talk" is presenting those harmed by racism as deficient in some way and evoking a paternalistic pity towards them. For white preachers to preach about racism, they must be aware of how the words they use to depict racism can perpetuate harmful stereotypes towards those already negatively impacted by the racialized social structure. The "sins" of sin-talk regarding racism include pathologizing non-whites in the process of discussing injustice against them, creating a paternalistic or condescending tone towards such groups, and minimizing the problem so as to make the problem be more about these other non-white groups than about the white listeners. The following section provides an example of how sermons seeking to address social justice can be well-meaning and yet perpetuate social injustice.[18]

Sermon Sample #3: "One Person's Problem Becomes Everybody's Problem"

An example of this kind of "sinning in sin talk" comes from a large white church in a large metropolis where the majority of the population within city limits is African American. The congregation includes a number of very affluent and influential people,

---

[18] Identifying information has been removed to maintain the anonymity of the preacher whose sermon I critique here. Because the purpose of this dissertation is to encourage preaching on race, I have avoided identifying white preachers whose sermons I use in critique so as to not embarrass the preachers or churches where these sermons are preached or dissuade them from preaching on racism again.

including a few local celebrities. The preacher is preaching on the subject of "justice."
This sermon is not preached on the Sunday right before Martin Luther King Day, but
rather within a sermon series that focused on the Biblical prophets. Race is mentioned or
alluded to several times, but in a way that further inscribes non-white persons in the
framework of being both condemned and pitied. I will summarize the sermon's structure
to provide context for the three segments I quote below.

The sermon begins by describing the messages of the prophets as being "in your
face," in the sense that God calls the wealthy to account for the injustice they perpetuate
against the poor. The preacher explains the context for the harsh words of the prophets,
and after reading the text begins by saying that "justice is among the hottest topics out
there today." The Trayvon Martin case and the trial of George Zimmerman are
mentioned, followed by the Casey Anthony case and the Rodney King case, using these
high-profile cases to describe how discussions at the preacher's family gatherings became
heated when these controversial cases were mentioned. The preacher summarizes the
heated responses this way: "Nothing upsets us like when we perceive injustice." The
preacher then gives an image of a playground with children crying out "that's not fair,"
moving from the playground image to that of a "level playing field" as the way we tend
to understand justice. The preacher then asserts that "Biblical justice is more than just a
level playing field." The preacher argues that the God of the Bible "tips the scales"
towards those who are downtrodden, and that level playing fields do not lead to justice.
Furthermore, the preacher says, the government cannot help us achieve justice because
they are "trapped in the wrapping of legal minutia," so the work of justice is "in our
hands." The rest of the sermon unfolds to proclaim four points for how the listeners are to

"do justice": care globally, engage locally, get angry, and think structurally. Below, I focus on three particular segments in the sermon to discuss the illustrations used to convince the congregation to "engage locally," and the ways the preacher depicts how to "think structurally."

To "engage [justice] locally," the preacher begins to give statistics about the terrible condition of education in the city, citing that the state is among the lowest in the country for high school graduation rates. The preacher suggests that many people may say " 'Well, that's not my problem,' " so the preacher provides an illustration attributed to C.S. Lewis: listeners are invited to imagine driving in a taxi next to another taxi, where one can see that the passenger in the other car is trying to strangle their taxi driver. The preacher rhetorically asks the listeners whether they would sit back and say, " 'Well, that's not my problem.'?" The preacher describes how this other car now puts everyone else at risk, and "you are now in an unsafe situation." The preacher continues:

> …One person's problem becomes everybody's problem. One person who has a mental problem and a gun becomes everybody's problem. You see, apathy in the end comes around to bite us because the broken and desperate people of our city are on the same roads and sharing the same world as us. Yes, we are our brother's keeper. I saw a headline the other day. It said, "Would you rather build preschools or prisons?" The compassion that God has for all people he wants to pour through us to the people around us, whether we like them or they are like us or not.[19]

The preacher here gives the congregation an analogy that motivates them to work for justice not out of a sense of moral duty or Christian responsibility, but because their lives are in danger. To engage locally, specifically in the area of education reform given as the context for their local city's problems, is a measure of self-defense. The preacher's

---

[19] Sermon Sample #3, segment transcribed from audio version of preached sermon available online.

set-up of talking about education initially suggested an approach of seeing others'

children as our own and responding to their needs as we would our own. The actual

illustrations that followed, however, presented these under-educated children as potential

psychopaths ("a person who has a mental illness and a gun"), desperate drivers sharing

the same roads, and future prisoners. Given that this church is located in a city with a

majority of African-Americans, and that segregated neighborhoods and underfunded

schools lead to poorer educational opportunities in many of the African American

communities in this city, these illustrations can be read as negative portrayals of African

Americans as pathological and criminal. Even though the preacher is preaching on

justice, urging the congregation to "care locally," the words and illustrations used in this

sermon further inscribe the racism that structures the local community in its fear of the

racialized "other." Furthermore, the preacher's words about God using the hands of the

congregation to pour out compassion to others around them, "whether we like them or

they are like us or not," continues to portray the sense that these others who God wants

the congregation to help are not persons "we like" and who "are [not] like us." The image

of "the people around us" is one of disdain and difference, even though it is to these

others that the congregation's efforts at doing justice should be aimed in "pour[ing] out

compassion."

Further on in the sermon, the preacher concludes this four-part message with the

instruction: "think structurally." This is the transition to the topic of structural injustice.

To give an example of structural injustice, the preacher highlights the unsafe working

conditions of persons working in other countries to make the clothing sold "for us." The

specific example is of the Bangladeshi factory that collapsed in 2013, killing over eleven

hundred people. The preacher follows this example, however, with a comment that seems to blame other societies rather than the countries owning the corporations exploiting these workers. Here are the preacher's words:

> … Care globally, engage locally, get angry, and fourth, this is the controversial one: think structurally. There is so much of our world's suffering that is simply the result of structural injustice. For example, many of our chain clothing stores have their clothes made in sweat shops in countries that do not have adequate safety standards. This is not just an abstract concept. You may remember this year on April 24th there was a fire in Bangladesh where 1100 people died horrible deaths in a death trap building while making T-shirts and clothes for us. You see, there are societies who do not share our Christian understanding of the preciousness of every human life. So by structural injustice, we're talking about how a society can be rigged so that some people are always going to be facing injustice.[20]

The reference to the 1100 Bangladeshi factory workers killed in a collapse of a factory deemed unsafe is connected to the listeners' consumption of clothing, but the evoked pity for these victims turns quickly to condemnation of their society: "there are societies who do not share our Christian understanding of the preciousness of every human life." The preacher could have made a link more directly between the clothes purchased in "our chain clothing stores" and the unsafe working conditions of the factory workers making the clothes, calling attention to the responsibility these retail stores and their consumers have towards these exploited workers. However, the connection is lost by the dismissal of responsibility in favor of blaming the tragedy on the lack of "Christian understanding of the preciousness of every human life." The fact that the largest majority of religious Bangladeshis are Muslim makes this comment stand out as a clear condemnation of the Bangladeshi society, rather than a condemnation of the

---

[20] Sermon sample #3, transcribed from the audio version of the preached sermon available online.

corporations and consumers who profit from the low wages and unsafe working conditions of those who died in the Bangladeshi factory.

Finally, the preacher moves to examining "our great example of structural injustice" which "was slavery." The preacher explains how this structural injustice could have happened: "so many good people who personally believed in individual justice but somehow we could not make the connection between justice and the structural injustice of an economic system that treated some people as less than human." I quote this lengthy final segment of the sermon in order to provide a full picture for the illustration the preacher uses to end the sermon on the subject of justice, focusing here on the issue of structural injustice as it was exemplified in slavery and segregation:

> Here in America, of course, the great example of structural injustice was slavery. And it was so strange because there were so many good people who personally believed in individual justice but somehow we could not make the connection between justice and the structural injustice of an economic system that treated some people as less than human. It was the Civil Rights movement that woke up the church to the fact of, uh, structural injustice.
>
> Did you know that one of the heroes of the civil rights movement was a very gentle pastor here [at our church]? Some of you remember this man by the name of [Name of previous pastor]. A wonderful man.
>
> In 1965 he was the pastor of the *Grace* Church of Selma, Alabama. Martin Luther King came to town, and Selma became a powder keg. [Our previous pastor] was in the eye of that storm. One night, in the midst of that racial tension, he gathered his elders one night, and here is how [he] later remembered it: "We all sat around a table. I said that I wanted them each to say how they felt. I said I would start and what I said was I can't imagine us turning anyone away who comes to this church. Some disagreed but each had his say. Nobody said anything downward about anyone else. Any disagreement was with me. But they had taken a liking to me. They unanimously voted to seat anyone who came to worship.
>
> "The deacons who greeted at the doors were told of the session's decision. Then three young black girls, late teens and early twenties, went to the [other] church across the street first and were turned away. They then walked over to our church, and were seated. I was in the midst of the pastoral prayer and I heard these steps on the hard wood floors in the narthex. I looked up, and without

missing a syllable of my prayer, and saw them seated in our congregation. Only one white family got up and left the church when my prayer was over. The next day the local newspaper had a big banner headline that read [*Grace Church*] *Integrated*."

        From that moment on, [this pastor] became a national figure, he got hate mail, threatening phone calls, they dumped garbage on his front lawn. He got one death threat…And in the midst of all that furor, he released an open letter, here's what he wrote: "We must begin where people are. Some are in Christ, some are apart from Christ. And let's not forget that there are good Christian people who do not see eye-to-eye on this deeply involved matter. Oh how the Lord can use an open mind and a sanctified sense of humor. Do pray for these virtues and evidence them." Well, it turns out then that all prophets aren't obnoxious, are they! There's always [this pastor]. I want to be like [this pastor]! I want to get angry at problems and not at people. I love the fact that [this pastor] when threatened said, "Let's not lose our sense of humor!"

        …Care globally, engage locally, get angry, and don't forget to think structurally. *That* is biblical justice.[21]

This final illustration makes the most direct connection to racism than any of the previous illustrations, by discussing the segregation of churches and the Civil Rights movement. This anecdote connects the listeners of this particular church with a previous pastor who worked for racial integration while serving in a church in Selma. The narrative of how that church achieved integration begins with the setting of the "powder keg" of Selma after Martin Luther King arrived. The pastor calls a meeting of the church leaders together and expresses his own feelings that his congregation should allow African Americans to be seated in worship, and because they had "taken a liking to [this pastor]," the other leadership in the white congregation reluctantly agrees. When "three young black girls" enter, they are seated in worship, and only one white family leaves. The resultant integration as a result of this white church allowing "three young black girls" to sit in worship was presented as a triumph over segregation as demonstrated by

---

[21] Sermon Sample #3, transcribed from audio version of sermon available online.

the attention it received in the local news. The aftermath of this event includes threats to the pastor, following by his open-letter response which encourages others to have an open mind and a sense of humor.

Before I move to critiquing this segment, I want to highlight the positive elements I see the preacher incorporating with these illustrations. First, in the audio version, the preacher acknowledges "*we* could not make the connection between justice and the structural injustice…that treated some as less than human." To use the pronoun "we," the pastor is including the congregation as among those who failed to recognize the injustice of slavery and segregation. This identification is an important step. Second, the preacher helps the congregation identify not just with white segregationists, but also with white integrationists by linking their current church involvement to the work of a pastor who previously served at that church. Because this previous pastor worked at their church, he is presented as one of them, and presents an image of a legacy that this current church could take up and further. Third, in the integration illustration, the Selma church's pastor uses his own power and influence in the congregation to persuade others to become open to integration, sharing his perspective to cast a vision for the congregation: "I wanted them to each say how they felt. I said I would start and what I said was I can't imagine us turning anyone away who comes to this church. Some disagreed but each had his say. Nobody said anything downward about anyone else. Any disagreement was with me." To start the conversation with his own views, which were "I can't imagine us turning anyone away who comes to this church," the pastor in this illustration was claiming an image of the church's identity as open to all and hospitable. The pastor could not imagine this church any other way. Stating his beliefs in this way, the pastor was not shaming the

others in leadership, and instead spoke to the best of their qualities as a congregation,

opening a new possibility for how the congregation viewed themselves and building upon

their previous legacy of hospitality. Finally, for the preacher to use this illustration of

integration to urge the congregation to "think structurally" in terms of biblical justice, the

preacher is taking a risk by highlighting the current demographics of the church as being

predominantly white. While this illustration takes place in the past, it has relevance for

the present and future of a predominantly white church located in a city with a majority

of African Americans. Thus, in these four ways, this preacher's final sequence of sermon

illustrations are helpful for introducing the white congregation to the continuing problem

of racism in their midst.

Yet this sermon, including its final sequence, includes several problematic aspects

as well. Though the segregation of the Selma church could provide a mirror for

examining the church's current segregation, there is no a direct connection made which

might prevent congregations from making the connection themselves. Second, this final

anecdote also runs the risk of oversimplifying the concept of "structural injustice" to

consist of an individual church's decision whether to allow African American women to

sit in worship. In fact, though omitted in the spoken audio version of the sermon which I

transcribed for the quote above, the manuscript of the sermon available online included

the summation: "There went one structural injustice—segregation into black and white

churches." While segregation was a "structural injustice," its structural component

involved a vast social acceptance for segregated institutions and facilities and a culture of

white supremacy that feared racial "mixing," so claiming that one church's decision to

integrate as doing away with "one structural injustice" does a disservice to the wide-

ranging problem of segregation and the fierce opposition faced by those working for desegregation. Third, this illustration presents the women who entered the church as "three young black girls, late teens early twenties," a label that fosters a paternalistic stance towards these women who had great courage to enter an all-white church when Selma was a "powder keg." It paternalistically presents integration as being the result of the heroic white pastor and the reluctantly-inclusive white congregation, rather than the larger Civil Rights movements, which included concerted efforts at organizing and learning techniques of non-violent resistance, preparing persons such as these African American women entering this white church for what they might encounter.[22]

The sermon above, though well-meaning, includes several mistakes that echo the critiques Stephen Ray makes of Reinhold Niebuhr. The preacher is calling attention to the social injustice present in the city and around the world, but in both settings, the "problems" come across as largely within the persons who are already most affected by the injustice. To summarize, the sermon discussed above failed in its portrayal of the sin of "structural injustice," a term which becomes a euphemism for racism in much of the sermon without using the terms "race" or "racism." Its failures include its minimalization of the problem of racism: "Justice is one of the hottest topics,"; its pathologization of those the congregation is called upon to help: "One person with a mental problem and a gun is suddenly everybody's problem," and "Not all societies have our Christian understanding of the preciousness of every human life;" and its paternalism towards African Americans: "three young black girls, late teens early twenties." The "sins" of sin-talk demonstrated in this sermon: minimizing the problem, pathologizing groups already

---

[22] For details on the history of the training Civil Rights organizers went through before intentionally engaging in acts of desegregation, see Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

disadvantaged by systemic injustice, and evoking pity or paternalizing condescension towards those who have been unjustly discriminated against, are potential pitfalls for sermons that seek to address racism. In addition to being careful in how they speak of racism and the groups most impacted by racism, white preachers need to be well-versed in an alternative discourse for describing the sin of racism. The rest of this chapter seeks to point towards possible sources for such an alternative discourse.

Naming Racism as Sin: The Metaphors of Idolatry, Estrangement, and Bondage

The first part of this chapter raised the problem of the subtle ways sin-talk perpetuates racist discourse. The ways white preachers preach about the sin of racism prove to be insufficient for naming how whites today continue to perpetuate racism. The critiques of Stephen Ray raise awareness for how talking about racism can actually contribute to racism, committing sin while engaging in sin-talk. Thus, in response to the first section, the rest of the chapter will seek to provide a more adequate presentation of racism as sin in hopes of avoiding the sins of sin-talk when speaking about racism.

The three metaphors of idolatry, estrangement and bondage will structure the following discussion of racism as sin. These three metaphors have been discussed earlier within Christian history; Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century discussed "bondage" as a way of understanding sin, and twentieth century theologians Karl Barth and Paul Tillich have discussed the metaphors of idolatry and estrangement. Yet this paper will not rely on these three figures for elaborating these images of sin, because none of them operated out of a hermeneutic that recognized the salience of racism today. While there is a rich resource to mine in the works of these three theologians, this chapter relies on the

work of theologians who write from a hermeneutic position of recognizing the continued

problem of racism as a central problem to theology. Within this hermeneutic tradition,

some of the earliest work done on racism in theology was by George D. Kelsey, a

professor who taught Martin Luther King, Jr. A few years after Kelsey published *Racism*

and the Christian Understanding of Man, James H. Cone published his revolutionary

work *Black Theology and Black Power,* where he boldly proclaimed that "there is a need

for a theology whose sole purpose is to emancipate the gospel from its 'whiteness'"[23] and

"It is the job of the Church to become black with [Christ] and accept the shame which

white society places on blacks."[24] Cone declared the reconciliation of the New Testament

"is not smoothing things over by ignoring the deep-seated racism in white society. It is

freeing the racist of racism by making him confront blacks as men."[25] In the years since

Cone's initial work, many other theologians have published theological works from

distinctive racial social locations as a way of demonstrating how context and experiences

of oppression impact the work of theology and can reveal the ways theology has been

used to buttress white supremacy.[26] Womanist theologians such as Delores Williams

began highlighting the intersections of race and gender in their theological works through

a womanist hermeneutic.[27] The most recent generation of black theologians have

---

[23] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 32.

[24] Ibid., 69.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See also important texts such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973); Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990); and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

[27] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*; For a definition of "womanism," see the work of Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004).

included scholars such as J. Kameron Carter, Willie James Jennings, and M. Shawn Copeland. These scholars are broadening the conversation for how we understand racism as sin, exposing the depth of the complicity of theology in advancing white supremacy, and offering a vision for a reclamation of the Christian tradition that addresses the wounds inflicted on both the advocates and opponents of white supremacy.

While the works of only three theologians have been employed here to discuss racism as sin in the forms of idolatry, estrangement, and bondage, many others could have been included for our discussion. The choice of these particular authors resulted from Kelsey's role as a forerunner to black theology in his insight to racism as an alternative faith system, and the contemporary roles of Carter and Copeland in extending the discourse of black theology to include analysis of historical theological development and Catholic theology. The discussions below of these theologians' work as it relates to the themes of racism as idolatry, estrangement, and bondage are meant to serve as samples of further ways racism can be depicted in theological language to help white preachers make sense of racism's continued malevolent presence.[28]

Sin as Idolatry: Racism as an Alternative Faith System

The first part of the triad of metaphors for racism as sin that I will discuss here is that of idolatry. The "idol" of worship in racism is the shifting normativity of white supremacy, a normativity that values the perspectives, contributions and institutions of white culture, while simultaneously devaluing and disrespecting those of non-white

---

[28] Ricoeur reflects on the symbols used to describe evil, arguing that these symbols help us make sense of the world and the relationship of evil in the world to what we hold sacred. I am similarly arguing that these three metaphors for racism serve to function as an aid to our understanding of how the evil of racism relates to what we hold sacred and how it impedes our spiritual growth. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

cultures. Calling the idol of racism "white supremacy" is a way of highlighting the standards set by white culture that continue to prevent full participation of all persons in intellectual and cultural discourse. Persons whose interests and opinions fall outside the white norms are considered less valid, less interesting, and less valuable than those that conform to the traditionally-white norms.[29] These white norms are not invented overtly, but rather carry over from a long tradition of white cultural supremacy.

To name sin as "idolatry" is to shed light on the arbitrariness of such cultural standards, standards that our society "worships" by giving them full authority. To name sin as idolatry is also to identify its all-encompassing nature. To worship an idol is to assent to a particular worldview that holds that idol in highest esteem, accepts its judgments as true, and fears its wrath upon transgressing its values. To worship an idol is to try and bring one's life into alignment with the values represented by that idol and to judge one's own value and worth by how much one conforms to the standards dictated by the idol. To worship an idol is to worship anything other than the One True God, the God who commanded the Israelites to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Several theologians have identified sin as idolatry, particularly as it relates to race. In 1965, George H. Kelsey published his work *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* in which he identifies racism as an alternative faith system. Throughout his book, Kelsey contrasts the racist perspectives on humanity, equality, sin, and redemption, with the Christian understanding of such doctrines. In this way he clearly articulates the

---

[29] For a discussion of the "epistemic arrogance" that disregards the perspective of racial and gendered others, see Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*.

contrast between racism and Christianity, identifying that Christians can also be racist, believing also in this alternate faith system.[30]

Kelsey writes that persons who have committed themselves to a racist faith system must experience a form of conversion. In contrast with the conversion required in order to become a Christian, the conversion needed by racists is in addition-to and not replaced-by a conversion to Christianity, since for white Christians, the "Christianity" they have converted to may actually be the religion of racism dressed up as Christianity. Kelsey writes: "The renewed individual in a racist society is obviously a person with basically the same commitment as the renewed individual in any society. But renewal in a racist society involves also the peculiar experience of deliverance from the special bondages and false perspectives imposed and inculcated by the racist faith."[31] This additional conversion is required because white Christians have professed their faith in Christ while simultaneously holding on to their faith in white normativity. Kelsey writes: "The racist self, which identifies itself with wisdom and virtue, must be confronted by the Christ who is, in truth, wisdom and virtue. Only when the sinful, self-centered self is shattered and destroyed can it be renewed."[32] That is, the Christian must allow Christ to confront her racism as a pernicious idolatry firmly resisting its identification as such. The "wisdom and virtue" of the racist self must be identified as the idolatry it is, shattered in the norm-defying, standard re-defining nature of Christ.

Kelsey writes of the difficulties churches have had with understanding both the systemic and interpersonal characteristics of racism. This lack of understanding is further

---

[30] Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*.

[31] Ibid., 175.

[32] Ibid., 176.

entrenched by a lack of contact with persons of color since white churches continue to be segregated.[33] This is exemplified in the following passage in which he discusses the problems churches have with identifying racism or acknowledging its all-encompassing influence in cultural and religious values:

> In recent years the Churches have also indicated an increasing awareness that racial hostility is a structured social and political system. For a long time the individualistic illusions of Protestants stood in the way of this awareness. But even this important growth in understanding is not enough. The Churches must also grasp the extent and degree in which the racist faith has permeated cultural institutions and ideas. …Racism is 'in the air.' In one way or the other, it influences the daily decisions and expectations of persons who harbor only a mild, conformist form of prejudice or may even be 'liberal.' …The Churches must address themselves to the task of the transformation of cultural values and expectations. Obviously, the Churches stand condemned in their own segregated life, but they cannot wait to be purged of sin before they proclaim the Word of God to a sinful world.[34]

In other words, the churches must confront the racism that permeates "cultural institutions and ideas" and the "daily decisions and expectations of persons who…may even be 'liberal.'" Churches "stand condemned in their own segregated life," that is, the ways churches continue to be segregated by race demonstrates the sin of estrangement in which we stand condemned.

While Kelsey helps us understand the religious nature of racism, theologian J. Kameron Carter locates the historical shift that led towards this religion of racism. In his masterpiece *Race: A Theological Account*, Carter traces this fall into idolatry back to some of the earliest attempts to separate the embodied Jesus from his material identity living as a poor Jew. Within the Western tradition, one of the most famous (or infamous)

---

[33] Emerson and Smith, writing forty years after Kelsey, diagnosed the problem for white churches as being the same as had Kelsey in 1965, that white churches lacked the ability to understand the structural elements of racism, and that their segregated isolation prevented them from seeing racism any other way, Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

[34] Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, 175.

proponents of this non-Jewish, non-racial and thus white Jesus was Immanuel Kant. Carter discusses how Kant's writings articulate a theological justification for the confluence of racism, westernization, and Christianity. Among the pseudo-theology of this religion of racism, Carter identifies the soteriological, eschatological, pneumatological and ecclesiological correlations of this alternate faith system:

> Whiteness is both 'now and not yet.' It is a present reality, and yet it is also still moving toward and awaiting its perfection. The teleological end, which is the consummation of all things within the economic, political, and aesthetic—in short, within the structural—reality called 'whiteness,' is on the one hand made present and available now in white people and in white 'culture.' And on the other hand, it is through these white people and culture that the full reality of whiteness will globally expand to 'eschatologically' encompass all things and so bring the world to perfection. As I show below, Christianity as rational religion and Christ as the 'personified idea of the good principle' are the guarantee that whiteness, understood not merely and banally as pigment but as structural-aesthetic order and as a sociopolitical arrangement, can and will be instantiated in the people who continue Christ's work, the work of Western civilization. Rendering race invisible in all of this, Kant calls this not the work of whiteness but the task of the species as such.[35]

In Carter's reading of Kant, whiteness has assumed this "pseudotheological" quality or tyranny. Carter interprets Kant as using synonymously Christianity, Westernization, and white supremacy. Christianity is no longer the faith of belief in a crucified and risen Jesus Christ, but instead is deformed in Kant's work to become equated with imperialism. Not only is whiteness an alternate faith system, but it has entangled itself with the "work of Western civilization" which has also been conflated with those who "continue Christ's work."

---

[35] Carter, *Race*, 89.

Theologian M. Shawn Copeland has also written about racism in terms of the sin of idolatry, highlighting the real material, epistemic and spiritual effects of this alternative religious system. She writes:

> Not only does racism ignite pseudo-rationality, incite vicious practices and violent acts, it poisons the racist—crippling a woman's or a man's potential for authentic religious, cultural, social, moral, psychological, and spiritual growth. As intrinsic evil, racism is lethal to bodies, to black bodies, to the body of Christ, to Eucharist. Racism spoils the spirit and insults the holy; ***it is idolatry.*** Racism coerces religion's transcendent orientation to surrender the absolute to what is finite, empirical, and arbitrary, and contradicts the very nature of a religion. Racism displaces the Transcendent Other and selects and enthrones its own deity.[36]

Copeland's remarks describe how the idolatry of racism impinges upon the ability of persons to be truly religious, replacing true Transcendence with an arbitrary and finite idol that damages the spirit and body. Naming racism as idolatry not only signifies a religious and theological worldview that displaces the One True God, but also the "practices" of such a faith that inflict harm upon both its adherents and those outside the "faith." The idolatry of racism creates its own deformed rationality and its own violent religious practices.[37]

Sin as Estrangement: Naming Systemic-and-Interpersonal Racism

Another way of depicting the sin of racism is through the metaphor of estrangement.[38] This metaphor best captures the simultaneous systemic-and-interpersonal

---

[36] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 109–110, emphasis mine.

[37] See Cone's discussion of white Christianity's role in allowing the lynching of thousands of black men and women. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree.*

[38] For sake of brevity, I have not included all of the possible theologians who could be quoted in support of these metaphors. For instance, Willie James Jennings illuminates the impact of racism on

form racism takes in society, in which it is both a form of structured society as well as the result of individual interactions. While systemic-and-interpersonal racism relates closely with the notion of racism as idolatry or alternative faith system, it is also distinct in that it links what appear to be unintended consequences of structures beyond our control, with the daily interpersonal interactions we have with one another. That is, systemic-and-interpersonal racism deals not just with notions of the transcendent ideals and standards to which we hold ourselves and others, but it names the specifically interpersonal nature of the harms of racism. The concept of sin that best captures this dual quality is estrangement, the alienation persons experience not only from God but from one another.

Sin as estrangement locates the heart of sin as the separation from God and others that results from our actions individually and collectively. Because estrangement refers not just to individuals in their relationship with God, but also to individuals in their relationships with others, and groups in relationship to other groups, this concept of sin helps us grapple with the complex social dynamics effected by racism, both the structural and interpersonal nature of sin. To speak of estrangement as *sin* is to locate it specifically within a religious tradition that confesses a transcendent God whom we can sin against. That is, estrangement is not simply a matter of inter-human, interpersonal rupture, but a rupture of the divine-human relationship.

The metaphor of sin as estrangement can be heard in the work of Copeland as she contrasts the communal nature of the Trinity with the disconnectedness resulting from oppression. Copeland discusses the nature of humanity-in-relationship, identifying humans as being-in-relation with others as a reflection of the Godhead. She closely links

---

intimacy--intimacy with God and with others--and would be an additional resource to consider for describing racism as estrangement. See Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, especially pp. 6–10, 248.

interpersonal relationships with the relationship of humanity to God: "Humanity in its diversity is a reflection of the community of the Three Divine Persons. Their divine love constitutes our unity in and realization of the mystical body of Christ. …In the mystical body, we belong to God and we are for one another. Through the animation of the Spirit we are knitted and joined together; we find authentic identity in union with the Three Divine Persons and with one another."[39] This unity is contrasted with the sin resulting from racism and oppression: "Oppression assaults (materially rather than formally) our connectedness to one another by setting up dominative structural relations between social and cultural groups as well as between persons. Oppression is both a reality of the present and a fact of history. Solidarity mandates us to shoulder our responsibility to the past in the here-and-now in memory of the crucified Christ and all the victims of history."[40] Copeland's work highlights the role of racism and other forms of oppression in separating us from one another, both in the present and through history. The past and present are both impacted by such oppression, and it disrupts our ability to remain united with others and with God, unable to "find authentic identity in union with the Three Divine Persons and with one another." Humanity's estrangement from God and within itself has occurred both in history and continues in the present, and its effects are seen in the disruption of our relationships both interpersonally and systemically, as well as with our relationship with God.

Carter's work also illuminates the sin of racism as estrangement, and identifies the work of Christ in redeeming that estrangement. First, he locates estrangement in the white identity that looks only to other whites for its confirmation, refusing to look for its

---

[39] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 104.

[40] Ibid., 100–101.

identity from nonwhite sources. Carter writes of the particular way this estrangement

results from the one-way non-receptivity of white identity, preventing whites from

engaging in relationship with others. The history of racial oppression has led to a "one-

way expression of ecstatic identity as whiteness," in which whites demonstrate their

alienation from God and from others in their inability to receive their identity from

anywhere else but themselves.[41] Carter's reflections on this one-way non-receptivity of

white identity are drawn from his analysis of the work of Maximus the Confessor, whose

texts Carter sees as "resources for thinking about what it might mean to extricate

Christian theology as a discourse from its historic entanglements with the

pseudotheological tyranny of whiteness and the Western conquest to own and order."[42] It

is here that Carter finds resources for understanding how Christ heals the estrangement

enacted by racism by reopening humans to one another and to God. Carter explains that

according to Maximus the Confessor:

> …Maximus conceives of human nature as being reopened in Christ, not simply to
> God but also to itself. Christ reopens humanity to embrace the many that is
> constitutive of created human nature and of creation itself. In this sense, Christ
> reintegrates human nature, enacting it no longer with an order of tyrannical
> division but, rather, in an order of 'peaceful difference,' the one-many structure of
> creation. …[Christ enables] the reopening of human nature itself so that it is no
> longer hermetically sealed in upon itself within a 'fortress mentality.' For the
> insularity of human nature is the ground of tyranny.
> …Maximus saw in Christ the solution to the many violent and tyrannical
> divisions that could arise… In Christ, the gesture of ecstatic openness to God in
> human self-fulfillment, which is the gesture to receive oneself from God, is
> necessarily a gesture of openness to all created beings as revealing God. 'To be'
> ecstatically is to receive oneself from other human beings precisely as the
> receiving of self from God. Hence, being named from God entails being named

---

[41] Carter, *Race*, 352.

[42] Ibid., 345–346.

from other human beings. In undoing whiteness as a theological problem, Christ leads human nature out of this disposition.[43]

We find here in Carter's interpretation of Maximus the theme of Christ's ability to undo the problem of whiteness by opening up persons to one another and to God, enabling us to receive "oneself from other human beings precisely as the receiving of self from God." That is, we turn to one another and we receive ourselves, uniting ourselves to persons out of the unity with God that Christ has enabled.

Yet even when we recognize the ways we have idolized a standard of whiteness in our cultural, intellectual and aesthetic preferences, and we have seen the estrangement resulting from our insistence in turning only to whiteness for our reflective identity, there is still another aspect of racism that is thus far unnamed. The embodied nature of racism is such that the habitus of our physical responses to the bodies of others depends not on our rational intention but rather the ingrained and inherited tradition of racist praxis. We may be able to see the idolatry of whiteness, and we may develop authentic relationships with persons of color, but how do we account for the ways we continue to speak and behave in ways that perpetuate racism? Thus, we turn in the final section to the notion of sin as bondage, to describe the habitus of racism and its embodied manifestations.

Sin as Bondage: Responding to the Embodied Nature of Racism

Finally, the third category for naming sin—bondage—focuses on the seeming intractability of racism, how persons respond to others out of the embodied *habitus* cultivated by living in a racist society. The concept of sin as bondage helps us

---

[43] Ibid., 351–352, 353.

conceptualize how even well-meaning whites *perform* racism through their bodies and in their linguistic choices, drawing from a repertoire of actions and utterances that have been shaped historically and ideologically by a larger system of racism. This embodied form of racism, or bondage, cannot be eradicated by simply a rational rejection of racist beliefs. We are bound to sin, that is, we cannot escape it because of our historical location, having inherited the sinful legacies of an oppressive society.

Speaking of sin as bondage evokes the work of Augustine of Hippo, who saw sin as a self-forged chain, a chain binding us in our sin, but a chain that nonetheless we are responsible for because we initiated its creation.[44] Similarly, racism is a human construction: it is not natural or biological. Humans created it. At the same time, though humans created racism it is not within human power to simply destroy it. It lives on in us, habituated in our bodies. As we will learn from Copeland, we cannot deny that our bodies have been marked by the idolatrous significations of racism, nor can we consent to their ultimacy. Rather, we must acknowledge the marking of our bodies while at the same time calling upon the Transcendent Other into whose marked body we have all been in-corporated.

Speaking of racism with the metaphor of sin as bondage calls attention to embodiment of sin and the significance attributed to particular bodies. Persons respond physically to the bodies of others based on the meanings attributed to them. Calling racism as the sin of bondage connotes a restriction in one's will, a lack of freedom to do

---

[44] See Augustine's *Confessions*, Book 8, Chapter 5.10: "For this was what I was longing to do; but as yet I was bound by the iron chain of my own will. The enemy held fast my will, and had made of it a chain, and had bound me tight with it. For out of the perverse will came lust, and the service of lust ended in habit, and habit, not resisted, became necessity. By these links, as it were, forged together -- which is why I called it "a chain" -- a hard bondage held me in slavery. But that new will which had begun to spring up in me freely to worship thee and to enjoy thee, O my God, the only certain Joy, was not able as yet to overcome my former willfulness, made strong by long indulgence. Thus two wills -- the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual -- were in conflict within me; and by their discord they tore my soul apart."

what one wants. While racism initially began as a justification for the bondage and enslavement of others, the sin of racism becomes itself a chain that binds persons born into a racist society and limits their ability to choose freely to embrace others. Sin as bondage calls attention to the physical movement of our bodies as they respond to the bodily presence of others who have been "marked" by racism, reflexively considering how persons read, interpret, and respond to the bodies of others.

Copeland discusses embodiment in her work *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being,* in which she highlights the ways bodies are inscribed with the oppressive meanings given to persons by society in the present and the meanings which persons have inherited. Copeland helps illuminate how the sin of racism as embodied bondage must be healed by an embodied Christ. Furthermore, reflecting on Christ's body as marked helps us see the markings of our bodies re-incorporated as the body of Christ. Thus, Copeland helps us to name the chains of these markings, but also to name the ways these very same bodies have been "marked" by Christ. Our bodies are reinterpreted in Christ's body as we live as the body of Christ. In this way, we consider both how Christ identifies with the bodily markings that have significance for us in our society, and how these markings become re-signified in Christ as we see them re-membered as Christ's body. Copeland writes:

> If theological reflection on the body cannot ignore a Christ identified with black, brown, red, yellow, poor white, and queer folk, neither can it ignore reflection on 'the flesh of the Church.' For as Gregory of Nyssa tells us, whoever 'sees the Church looks directly at Christ.' And as the flesh of the church is the flesh of Christ in every age, the flesh of the church is marked (as was his flesh) by race, sex, gender, sexuality, and culture. These marks differentiate and transgress, they unify and bond, but the flesh of Christ relativizes these marks in the flesh of the church. These marks may count; but the mark of Christ, the baptismal sign of the cross, counts for more, trumps all marks. Still, counting and trumping marks in

the body of Christ must give way before *basileia* praxis. These acts of justice-doing, empire critique, love, and solidarity mark us as his flesh made visible leaven in our world.[45]

In this passage, Copeland does not minimize the ways our bodies are marked, but rather says that these markings are taken up into Christ and become the very vision of Christ in the world, reinterpreted by his cross. Thus, rather than a move towards "color-blindness," in which we pretend to not see color, Copeland advocates a movement towards these very identifiers as being now part of what it means to be the body of Christ. We are not united in Christ because we are all the same, rather, we are united in Christ because of the particularity of his incarnation, taking on the markings of an embodied poor Jew living under the Roman empire, and finally receiving the shameful marks of crucifixion. Because Christ has born these marks and continues to bear them, our physical markings are in-corporated in him and hence in God.

Finally, speaking of sin as bondage insists that humans have no part in their redemption. While humans can work towards reconciliation, redemption finally must come from God. The chains of sin must be broken by God, and the racism enfleshed in habituated bodies must be healed by One who can redeem our embodied existence. This sense of final dependence upon God for our redemption is the key concept conveyed by speaking of sin as bondage, and it is this utter dependence that whites must continue to stress even as they work to become anti-racist. Copeland speaks of this utter dependence upon God in releasing us from our bondage when she clarifies how she understands the "mystical body of Christ" and how only God can give us the future for which we hope:

> With the expression *mystical body of Christ*, I want to reaffirm salvation in human liberation as an opaque work, that is, a work that resists both the reduction of

---

[45] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 81.

human praxis to social transformation and the identification of the gospel with even the most just ordering of society. I am looking for a point of vantage that is pertinent to human development, relevant to human change in society, refuses to foreclose human history, and is concrete and comprehensive enough to be compatible with the human *telos* in the divine economy. Further, as I noted earlier, my thesis contains not only a critique, but also a judgment—and the judgment indicts us *all*. To think of our human being in the world as the mystical body of Christ retunes our being to the eschatological at the core of the concrete, reminds us of our inalienable relation to one another in God, and steadies our efforts on that absolute future that only God can give.[46]

As hard as we try to become anti-racist, ultimately our redemption lies not with our own efforts but on the grace of God. In this way, we cannot respond to the critiques of scholars such as Ray with anything but a "yes, you're right—keep holding us accountable." Because the sin of racism is enfleshed in habituated bodies, the chains that hold us fast remain. But what theologians such as Kelsey, Carter, and Copeland help us to affirm is that God will not leave us in our idolatry or estrangement or bondage. The hope of Christian faith is that the in-breaking of God's Spirit will continue to heal the sin that remains. The evidence of this in-breaking may manifest in ways that correspond to the healing of sin as we have described it here. Rather than the idolatry of racism, perhaps whites can come to worship God alone and confess the idolatry of whiteness that continues to shape society. Rather than the estrangement of systemic-and-interpersonal segregation, perhaps whites can begin to find their identities in mutual relationships with persons of color, seeing in relationships with others the very face of God. And rather than the bondage of habitual embodied disdain and disregard for the marked bodies of others, perhaps white Christians can begin to see in these marks the marks of Christ and come to

---

[46] Ibid., 102–103.

see their own white bodies as marked by the inherited sin of racism and redeemed by the marked body of Christ.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that naming racism as "sin" is a crucial task of preaching, yet it can also be done in such a way as to perpetuate harmful racist stereotypes and discourse. White preachers need a more adequate understanding of the manifestations of racism today, a white racial identity that acknowledges the hermeneutic limitations of their social position, and the ability to preach about racism so as to name it as sin without "sinning" against those already disadvantaged by racism. These three tasks will be put into conversation with hermeneutic Paul Ricoeur in the following chapter to bring them together under the rubric of "the hermeneutic of recognition."

Chapter 5: Paul Ricoeur and the Course of Recognition

"A purely semantic elucidation remains suspended until one shows that the understanding of multivocal or symbolic expressions is a moment of *self*-understanding; the *semantic* approach thus entails a *reflective* approach. But the subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the *cogito*: rather, he is a being who discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that he is place in being before he places and possesses himself. In this way, hermeneutics would discover a manner of existing which would remain from start to finish a *being-interpreted*."[1]

Introduction

Thus far, this dissertation has analyzed three possible sources for white preachers' reticence to preach about racism, including an inadequate understanding of the changing meaning of "racism," an insufficient analysis of one's own white racial identity, and a lack of theological vocabulary for describing the impact of racism on the spiritual lives of white Christians. The previous chapter focused on theological engagement with racism as sin in the forms of idolatry, estrangement, and bondage. Each of these metaphors pointed to the need for forgiveness and redemption, two concepts which are foreign to secular debates concerning governmental responses to institutional racism. This need for forgiveness and redemption is what compels the white preacher to take up the subject of preaching, since it is the vocation of the preacher to proclaim the good news, that God in Christ Jesus has come to redeem sinners. While this dissertation does not explore what such forgiveness and redemption might entail, I will focus the remaining chapters of this dissertation on how these other three elements—white preachers' understandings of racism, their racial identity, and racism as sin—can be incorporated into a single

---

[1] Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 11.

hermeneutic frame to motivate and sustain white preachers in their preaching ministry as they seek to equip predominantly white congregations to work against the racism that continues to persist in society and in churches.

The question may be posed at this point if the goal of the dissertation is complete, if by discussing the sources of reticence and describing the interpretive challenges to each source of reticence that I have provided the necessary content white preachers need to carry out the task of preaching on racism. The reason this is not the case is that the three discussions thus far need to be brought together within a hermeneutic framework that enables white preachers to make use of these insights in the process of sermon preparation. Additionally, the hermeneutic challenge is not to adopt a certain set of ideas and principles but rather to view the world a different way, and to be able to henceforth live a different kind of life. Thus, the challenge for white preachers is not simply what they must now say from the pulpit, but who they must be and how they must live. This chapter aims to provide a focal point for the hermeneutical movement that begins with the dissonance of recognizing the deeply-embedded racism that structures society which whites have inherited, that moves through self-reflection on the meaning of one's white racial identity via the particularities of one's social location and life narrative, and tries to comprehend the theological implications of the sin of racism. This chapter proposes a hermeneutical focal point for this process: gratitude. Gratitude becomes the motivating goal and the direction towards which white preachers can aim as they prepare to challenge racism through their sermons and in their ministry.

In French, the word for gratitude is *reconnaissance,* the word also used to express "recognition." The word "recognition" appears in theories of social justice that argue for

an ethics that attends to the social esteem of marginalized groups in addition to granting

such groups equal rights.[2] The phrase "mutual recognition" captures this ethic of

extending to others respect and dignity, just as one would expect respect and dignity from

others. This chapter will argue that the connection between recognition as gratitude and

recognition as mutual recognition via theories of justice provide us with a fruitful

dialogue out of which will emerge a hermeneutic of recognition for whites preaching on

racism that centers around recognition as gratitude. To make this connection, I will draw

from the work of Paul Ricoeur, whose *Course of Recognition* proposes an understanding

of mutual recognition based on gratitude.

Context for the Significance of "Recognition"

Another question might be posed about the concept of "recognition" as an

appropriate fit for the discussion at hand, so let me first provide a brief theoretical context

for how recognition has been used in recent decades to demonstrate its applicability to the

subject of preaching on racism. Recent theories of mutual recognition have drawn from

the philosophy of Hegel in arguing that social struggle involves the need and indeed the

demand for recognition from others because of the way subjectivity is constituted through

being recognized by others.[3] Axel Honneth is among the most frequently cited authors to

describe this process, arguing that mutual recognition includes the extension of love,

rights, and social esteem to others.[4] Nancy Fraser has critiqued the concept of mutual

---

[2] See, for example Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism*; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[3] Further description of Hegel's thought will be included later as Ricoeur engages this aspect of the philosophy recognition.

recognition as portrayed by Honneth for a lack of attention to the material elements of

social inequality.[5] Fraser argues that what needs to take greater precedence in concepts of

justice are considerations of economic and class factors which preclude persons from

participating as equals with others in society, even if they are held in "esteem." Fraser

argues that a dual analytical focus needs to be maintained, looking at social conflict both

with an eye for understanding the economic barriers to equality as well as the social

esteem required for participatory parity. Honneth's rejoinder to Fraser is that her concept

of analyzing economic barriers or arguing for redistribution, is one of the ways a theory

of recognition helps analyze social conflict, in that economic inequality is a kind of

identity and reality that must be recognized and addressed in order for a society to work

towards a vision of greater justice.[6]

Kelly Oliver has argued that it is the concept of "vision" within theories of mutual

recognition that render them problematic. Oliver discusses that those who decide who is

visible or invisible retain their power and dominance, even if seeking to recognize others

out of a motivation for justice. But if recognition remains tied to a problematic notion of

vision by assuming the dominant position of arbitrating between what is visible, then it

may perpetuate the injustice that it seeks to remedy.[7] Oliver lifts up the work of Patricia

Williams who writes to make black women visible while not making them a spectacle, as

---

[4] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth's work will also be discussed in further detail later in this chapter when Ricoeur engages his work in a "dialogue."

[5] Nancy Fraser, *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*, ed. Kevin Olson (Verso, 2008); See also Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[6] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[7] Oliver, *Witnessing*.

white culture is prone to do in fetishizing the black female body.[8] Drawing from

Williams's work, Oliver asserts that "being seen" can be empowering as well as

oppressive.[9] Thus Oliver argues that the "vision" of mutual recognition and the

assumption of the need to "be seen" as the goal of recognition, are both problematic

starting points for theories of recognition because they obscure the agency and

subjectivity of the one who is seen and fail to acknowledge the inadequacy of "mutuality"

present in such encounters of unequal power relations. Instead, Oliver argues for an

understanding of mutual recognition based on witnessing, both in the sense of eyewitness

and giving testimony to that which is unseen. The "vision" of being an eyewitness also

must be reformulated to consist in a loving gaze that intends connection rather than

alienation.[10]

The concept of mutual recognition has thus been employed as an image of justice

as social esteem in the midst of salient identities that have led to oppression. As seen in

the dialogue between Fraser and Honneth and in the critiques of Oliver, it is not without

its critics. But none of the proponents of mutual recognition have argued for a concept of

recognition that includes not just the turn to the other, but also the recognition of oneself,

as well as the recognition of what exactly is meant by "oppression." It is in this way that

---

[8] Patricia J Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[9] Kwame Anthony Appiah makes a similar argument when responding to Charles Taylor, asserting that valuing marginalized identities in a general way can result in the idealizing of certain forms of identity, setting up a standard for what "authentic" identities of (for instance) blackness or gayness, creating yet another opportunity for marginalization for persons who are black and gay (for instance) and who may not fit such expectations. K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann, 1994, 149–164.

[10] Oliver, *Witnessing*.

Ricoeur offers a nuanced perspective for understanding recognition philosophically as well as ethically.

Why Paul Ricoeur for a Theory of Recognition

Ricoeur's previous work has addressed questions of social justice, and Ricoeur's own history of having been a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II fueled his later reflections on human fallibility and questions of freedom of the will.[11] Ricoeur's work on narrative identity and testimony has been influential for other homileticians whose work builds on his hermeneutic philosophy.[12] Most convincingly, Ricoeur's analysis of recognition as gratitude in the process of mutual recognition rooted my studies in an affect that pointed away from the reflections of the self and towards another in an expression of gratitude. This gratitude will be explored as a motivating source in the hermeneutic of recognition. The majority of this chapter will be devoted to discussing Ricoeur's peculiar but characteristic "detours"[13] through recognition in his last book, describing the stages within this "course" of recognition that includes recognition-as-identification, recognition of the self, and mutual recognition.

The methodology in the following chapter will be to correlate the movement of recognition from identification to self-recognition to mutual recognition with the processes of identifying racism, understanding oneself as white, and understanding the

---

[11] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*; Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986); Ricoeur, *The Just*.

[12] Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*; Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*.

[13] Richard Kearney reflects on Ricoeur's detours as a method of hermeneutics: "Ricoeur's basic definition of hermeneutics as the 'art of deciphering indirect meaning'." Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 1.

need for redemption. The primary focus of this chapter will be how Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* offers a symbolic "detour" that opens up questions for self-reflection on the way to an understanding of mutual recognition as gratitude for white preachers preaching on racism in white congregations. Such a detour will prove to be beneficial in providing some distance from the complexities of racism and racial identity, enabling us to approach the complexities indirectly. While perhaps elements of Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* seem extraneous, the commentary attempts to provide enough context for how Ricoeur's detours connect with his earlier projects and engagements with other philosophers. In the next chapter, I will describe how Ricoeur's detours of conversation with these social sciences informs our hermeneutics of recognition for preaching on racism in white congregations.

Introducing Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition*

Ricouer's *Course of Recognition* originated as a series of lectures he gave in Vienna and Freiburg. The main idea governing these lectures was a philosophical exploration of the "semantic status" or the definitional understandings of the word "recognition" en route to discovering a philosophy of recognition. Ricoeur's previous work prepared him for pursuing this work, particularly as he moved from philosophical explorations of human freedom and agency in *Fallible Man* and *Symbolism of Evil* to a more ethical focus in *Oneself as Another* where he presents a hermeneutics of the self. In this latter work, Ricoeur posits a vision of the "good life" as pursuing the ethical intention to "live well with and for others in just institutions."[14] Questions of the nature of selfhood

---

[14] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

guide Ricoeur's discussion in *Oneself as Another*, and among the propositions he makes

there are the elements of the "capable human being" which he picks up again in *Course*

of Recognition. This phenomenology of the self occurs only in relationship to other

selves, requiring mutual recognition. Recognition of oneself is always connected to the

recognition of others and others' recognition of the self.

In pursuing a philosophy of recognition, Ricoeur makes an unusual

methodological move: he takes up the meanings of the word "recognition"--

reconnaissance--in two French dictionaries. In the differences of meaning, Ricoeur notes

a connection among the meanings, and these connected meanings have relevance for the

ways recognition has been used in different philosophical discourses ranging from

Descartes to Hegel. His interest lies not only in the differences between meanings, but

also in how the different ways "recognition" is used philosophically actually connect to

one another and lead from earlier usages. It is the fragile connections linking one form of

recognition to another that will provide the basis for our hermeneutic of recognition.

Early in his preface, he declares: "This book was born of a wager, that it is

possible to confer on the sequence of known philosophical occurrences of the word

'recognition' the coherence of a rule-based polysemy, capable of serving as a rejoinder to

that found in the lexical plane."[15] A "rule-based polysemy" is a phrase Ricoeur constructs

after examining the work of one of the classical French lexicographers, Émile Littré, who

wrote a comprehensive dictionary of the French language between the years of 1859 and

1872.[16] The "rule-based polysemy" that Ricoeur refers to is the way or method Littré

---

[15] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, x.

[16] Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de La Langue Française*, vol. 4 (Hachette et cie: Paris [etc.] :, 1873), 1519–1520, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030080462.

orders the dictionary definitions. That is, each word has several definitions (polysemy), but rather than just an incoherent gathering of distinct and differing meanings, the lexicographer must choose how to list them, and hence needs some sort of organizing principle. Littré states that he organizes the definitions under each word by determining the hidden principle or rule that guides the variance among meanings. Littré believed that the order of the meanings as they are listed under the words must be derived from a rule hidden in the meanings and examples themselves. This rule, then, links definitions together and creates movement towards the next definition. Littré draws from classical literature to find examples of the word, and in the various meanings exemplified in these selected passages, Littré finds ways the definition within the example hints towards the next meaning.

Ricoeur draws upon Littré's concept of such "rule-based polysemy" to argue his philosophical contribution to understanding the meaning of recognition. Within the lexical connections, Ricoeur finds a symbolic connection drawing the reader from one meaning to the next, in a way he finds similar to the various philosophical usages of the term "recognition." It is in these varying meanings of "recognition" as used by philosophers that Ricoeur detects a "rule" or principle that connects the meanings and moves from one to the other. This movement is what leads Ricoeur to call this book the "course" of recognition, rather than a theory of recognition.

Ricoeur states he is not offering a comprehensive theory.[17] Instead, he offers us a hermeneutic tour of interpreting "recognition" as it moves from one meaning to another, as seen in three distinct eras of philosophical discourse. His primary contribution to

---

[17] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 247.

reflections on recognition is highlighting the lexical connections of recognition with gratitude, where gratitude is the final culmination among the diverse variances of the term's definitions. Yet while his discussion leads to the "ultimate equating of recognition and gratitude," he maintains that his goal is to lift up the differentiated meanings of the word, remaining "halfway between homonymy and univocity."[18] That is to say, halfway between saying a word is spelled the same but means two entirely different things (such as the past tense verb "left" and the designation of one's "left" hand), and saying it means primarily only one thing (univocity). He does not want to present recognition as connoting three utterly distinct meanings, nor does he propose that he will offer a transcendent and overarching meaning. What he offers us instead is the sense of movement, of affinity, of drawing us from one sense to the following, presenting not gaps between definitions but rather crafting bridges from one to the other. These bridges between meanings will serve as a framework for holding together the seemingly-distinct sources of reticence in the first four chapters of the dissertation, bringing them together to form a hermeneutic of recognition for white preachers preaching on racism.

"Merely Semantics"?: Ricoeur Examines Lexicographical Definitions

Ricoeur's Introduction looks at the lexical definitions of the word "recognition" offered by Émile Littré in his dictionary referred to as the *Littré*. In *Littré*, Ricoeur sees a progression that begins in its initial definition of recognition as "to bring to mind again the idea of someone or something that one knows."[19] The movement begins here, because

---

[18] Ibid., x–xi.

[19] Ibid., 6.

while "recognition" is declared to be this act of bringing someone or something to mind, the "who" or "what" that is being recognized remains unsaid within the definition. Ricoeur highlights the significance of the unsaid as that which propels us forward into the subsequent meanings: "What is unsaid lies in the force of the *re-*, taken at first sight in the temporal sense of repetition. …What is more, if the definition evokes the mind's initiative…it leaves indistinct the *quid* of what is recognized as such. Indeed, nothing is said about the marks by which one recognizes something."[20] Thus, what is left unsaid opens the way to the following definition, which *Littré* offers as "2. To know by some sign, some mark, some indication, a person or a thing one has never seen before." Here in this second definition, Ricoeur sees what is unsaid: "What remains unsaid here is the reliability of the sign, the mark, or the indication of recognition by which one recognizes something or someone."[21] Yet again, it is the unsaid that propels us on to the next definition, which helps to answer the challenge of unreliable signs or marks. The third definition here is "3. To arrive at, to catch sight of, to discover the truth of something." With this third definition comes the introduction of the theme of truth, that this act of recognizing is not indifferent but rather calls us to assume a set of values. Yet Ricoeur points out that to "arrive at" also connotes a hesitation, whereas this discovery of truth occurred after some delay or resistance. This in turn can be seen clearly in the fourth definition: "4. To recognize with negation sometimes indicates not having any regard for, not listening to. *He recognizes no law but his own will*." This definition, according to Ricoeur, acknowledges the difficulties of recognition. Thus, in these first four of twenty-

---

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

three definitions, we can already see a journey of sorts, beginning with the mental

initiative of bringing something to mind, followed by the marks by which we are able to

identify that something, supported by the certainty or sense of truth we sense in this

recognition, and yet threatened by the always-looming possibility of the refusal to

recognize.

In moving beyond this to the following definitions, there is "an implicit operation

by means of which a gap is both acknowledged and overcome."[22] The meanings

themselves do not reveal the process of overcoming of the gap, but the subsequent

meanings may provide hints for what this process looks like. The fifth through seventh

definitions describe exploring and discovering what has been unknown, and then at

definition eight, "8. To admit, accept as true, as incontestable," Ricoeur highlights a

turning point. He writes:

> to *admit* is to put an end to a hesitation concerning the truth, but also to
> acknowledge it. The nuance suggested by the act of admitting is made more
> precise in the subsequent reference to the authority of someone, implicit in the
> idea of admitting: 'to submit to the authority of some person' (number nine). The
> shift from *admit* to *submit* is hardly perceptible. One could not have admitted, not
> submitted. Denial is not far off.[23]

Here again, we see Ricoeur making explicit the connections and links between the

definitions, identifying the movement that flows from one to the other.

Ricoeur's analysis of the many definitions offered by Littré forms a kind of

movement, as if the definitions themselves told a narrative of meaning.[24] The meanings

---

[22] Ibid., 7.

[23] Ibid.

implicit in this one word run a course that include objects, markings, truth, but also the reluctance and resistance to acknowledging such truth. As Ricoeur continues to describe subsequent definitions, he identifies other significant connections among the meanings as expressed in military use, filial use, declaration of faith, a confession, avowal of a debt or error. Yet a later definition is what Ricoeur takes to be "an unexpected guest—an uninvited one, moreover, in many languages other than French—recognition as gratitude."[25] The sixteenth definition, given in *Littré,* is "16. To have appreciate for, to bear witness to one's gratitude." Ricoeur reflects on this definition and what has led up to it: "We can see the connection to what preceded this: the avowal of a debt to someone, an avowal addressed to him, puts us on the road to gratitude, provided that the idea of a movement in return is added, one that is spontaneous, gracious in every sense of the word, as if a debt had been forgiven."[26] We see in Ricoeur's discussion of the definitions given under Littré's account of *reconnaître* the beginnings of his philosophical reflections, connecting the movement he sees in the lexical unfolding of the word with the philosophical uses of the same word.

Ricoeur then turns to the more recent and widely-used dictionary of the French language, that which was completed by Alain Rey, the work known as the *Grand Robert*, named after the primary benefactor supporting the lexicographer's effort.[27] The *Robert*

---

[24] This approach is consistent with Ricoeur's previous works based on the phenomenological method, as seen at least as early as his work on the human experience of understanding fallibility and evil. See Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*.

[25] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 8.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Alain Rey and Paul Robert, *Le grand Robert de la langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 1985), http://gr.bvdep.com/version-1/gr.asp.

comes a century after the *Littré*, and yet there are strong similarities and continuities in the definitions offered therein. Numerically, while the *Littré* gives twenty-three definitions for "recognition," the *Robert* offers a combination of thirteen distinct headings and derived sub-headings. The biggest change is in the presentation of the different definitions, or how the definitions appear ordered under the word. While in the *Littré*, each definition was offered its own number, the *Robert* presents definitions in a tree-like pattern, offering three primary definitions with derivations of those primary meanings given in indented sub-headings. For "recognition," *Robert* lists three primary meanings, and under the first primary meaning there are two branches, where under each branch there are multiple spin-offs with a number of examples from literary texts. The second primary meaning has seven branches, and the third primary meaning has two. Ricoeur's argument is that though the *Robert* does not explicitly state its attempt to list meanings according to a "rule-based polysemy," the *Robert*, too, reveals an internal organizational structure that is not very different in its progression than that of its predecessor a century prior.

The three primary understandings of the term "recognition" given in the *Robert* include:

1. To grasp (an object) with the mind, through thought, in joining together images, perceptions having to do with it; to distinguish or identify the judgment or action, know it by memory.
2. To accept, take to be true (or take as such).
3. To bear witness through gratitude that one is indebted to someone for (something, an act).[28]

---

[28] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 12.

From these three primary meanings, additional meanings "branch" off with derivative meanings.

Ricoeur cites the looseness of this first definition as an example of the difficulty of defining the term recognition, calling attention to the differences between actions such as join, distinguish, and identify that are all encompassed in this first definition. He sees the unifying concept within this definition the notion of the mind as the active agent involved, as that which brings together disparate concepts. This also distinguishes the term from its connotation of repetition—of not simply knowing something again (re-cognition), but involving a more complex process of integration and differentiation. In the second root meaning, Ricoeur sees the movement from the process of recognizing towards the thing that is recognized. That is, if the first meaning called our attention to the mental process involved, the second calls our attention to the veracity of that which is perceived, identifying the object as something accepted as true. The truth of the object of recognition moves us towards the third definition, found also in *Littré*, the expression of gratitude.

After discussing the three "root" meanings, Ricoeur proceeds to examine the progression of *Robert*'s tree of definitions, continuing to call attention to the gaps, wherein lie the "unsaid." In doing so, Ricoeur does not simply want to add to the definitions of the word given by the lexicographers. Rather, as he moves from this lexicographical study to the philosophical study of the term "recognition," he seeks to examine the philosophical questions arising from the gaps between definitions, gaps which also supply the hidden bridge leading from one meaning to the next.

Ricoeur Analyses "Recognition" in Philosophy

Moving from lexical analysis to philosophical trajectories, Ricoeur focuses on

how "recognition" has appeared in philosophy in three forms: recognition as a cognitive

identification, recognition of the self through memory and capabilities, and mutual

recognition as part of political philosophies. While Ricoeur will be in conversation with

several thinkers when discussing each form of recognition, he identifies the three primary

thinkers connected to these philosophical forms of recognition as Immanuel Kant, Henri

Bergson, and G. W. F. Hegel. Kant employs "recognito" in his first edition of the

Critique of Pure Reason, Henri Bergson questions our ability to "recognize" in the

process of remembering, and Georg Wilheim Freidrich Hegel made *Anerkennung* or

"recognition" central to his Jena writings on the struggle for freedom.[29] In the following

chapters in which Ricoeur discusses these three philosophical appropriations of the term

"recognition," he again sees a movement linking the three different eras and conceptions

of the term. This movement, Ricoeur argues, comes from the reversal of the verb tense

from active to passive, from recognition as an active verb "to recognize," to its passive

use in "to be recognized" or "to ask to be recognized."

Implied in this movement from active to passive in the philosophical meanings of

"recognition" is the growing independence of the term from its associations with

cognition alone. In *Robert*'s first definition, as well in the writings of Kant, Ricoeur

notes that recognition appears in the active sense as something of a mental activity,

initiated by the mind. Ricoeur sees in the definition and in the Kantian usage, a pairing of

the words "identify" and "distinguish" to depict the work of recognition in this first

---

[29] Ibid., 17.

sense. Ricoeur explains the significance of this pairing of identify/distinguish and how it links both the semantic definitions and the philosophical usage:

> To recognize something as the same, as identical to itself and not other than itself, implies distinguishing it from everything else. This first philosophical use verifies two semantic characteristics that we have seen connected to the use of the verb in the active voice—namely, the initiative of the mind in this mastery of meaning, and the initial quasi indistinguishableness of recognizing and knowing.[30]

This first philosophical understanding of recognition as identifying/distinguishing can be seen within the subsequent uses as well. Ricoeur writes: "It will still be *identity* that will be at issue when we come to self-recognition." The third philosophical theme of mutual recognition also contains this same pairing, for here "the question of identity will reach a kind of culminating point: it is indeed our most authentic identity, the one that makes us who we are, that demands to be recognized."[31] In each of the three philosophical uses of recognition then, Ricoeur notes a significant emphasis on the relationship between identification and distinction, or sameness and difference. Whereas the Kantian use of "recognition" does not differentiate the "object" or "thing" which is recognized from the knower, the next two movements reveal a greater stress on the "what" of recognition. In this progression, the "what" and the "who" is being recognized takes on more and more differentiation and distinction, a greater sense of the otherness and fragility involved in recognition.

---

[30] Ibid., 21.

[31] Ibid.

Ricoeur on Recognition as Identification

In the first set of philosophical conceptions of recognition, Ricoeur foregrounds the reversal from active to passive voice in the movement of recognition, moving from the mind's initiative to a dependence upon others. We will see this movement of active to passive voice present in his examination of recognition as identification, seen progressively in the philosophies of Descartes, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger. In this movement, we will see the role of identification and distinguishing, two steps in this paradoxical combination of the same and the other, to "identify" meaning claiming an object is the same and not another. Yet risk is always present. At each step there is the possibility of error, of misrecognition. The forces of change insure a constant risk as they impact the process of recognition.

Descartes: Recognition as Preceding Knowing through Identification and Distinction

Ricoeur presents Descartes as emblematic of the distinguishing aspect of recognition. Ricoeur wants to highlight that both distinguishing (setting apart) and identifying (connecting together) are part of philosophical understandings of recognition, just as they are introduced in the same lexical account of the definition of recognition in *Robert's* first root meaning of recognition: "to grasp (an object) with the mind, through thought, in joining together images, perceptions having to do with it, to distinguish or identify the judgment or action, know it by memory."[32] Ricoeur points out that distinguishing and identifying are linked together in judgment and in philosophical reflection: "In order to identify it is necessary to distinguish, and it is in distinguishing

---

[32] Ibid., 23.

that we identify."[33] This connection between identifying and distinguishing will remain throughout the discussions of recognition as identification, to recognition of the self, and finally to mutual recognition.

Descartes inaugurated a theory of judgment by a break with the tradition of education that centered on memorization. Instead, he presented a "method" of distinguishing rather than memorizing or repeating multiple opinions. He now wanted to be able to distinguish the true from the false with some certainty. Ricoeur points out the weakness hidden within this certitude, that the threat of error haunts the Cartesian discourse. Ricoeur's word for this kind of tenuous assertion of confidence or belief is "attestation," a term he uses to refer to the weakness of human understanding. "To recognize" in the Cartesian meditations always appears in the context of the fear of doubt, that it is possible to accept as true what is false, which "looms like the negative shadow of this proud accepting."[34] Ricoeur remarks that in Descartes' writings, recognition occurs in relation to the "hazards in the exercise of judgment."[35] It is in this risk of misrecognition as seen in the hazards of judgment that the significance of recognition takes on its greatest force. Ricoeur writes that it is "hesitation, a doubt that gives recognition its dramatic character. Then it will be the possibility of *misrecognition* that will give recognition its full autonomy. Misrecognition will be an existential, worldly form for which the more theoretical form of uneasiness—misjudgment—will not exhaust

---

[33] Ibid., 25.

[34] Ibid., 32.

[35] Ibid., 34.

the meaning."[36] Ricoeur challenges the certainty of Descartes' identification as distinguishing between true and false, and instead argues that recognition is coupled with the risk of mis-identifying as an always-threatening presence. Ricoeur also points out that the Cartesian context of recognition puts the grasping of an object with the mind on the same plane as the accepting as true, whereas these two connotations are separated as distinct root meanings in the *Robert*. These connotations will again be separated when moving to Kant, who revolutionizes "judgment" by attaching it to subjectivity.

Kant: Recognition as Knowing and Connecting Together in the Imagination

Whereas in Descartes, judging between true and false ruled as preeminent, in Kant, judgment is attached to subjectivity in a way that revolutionizes judgment. For both Descartes and Kant, to recognize is to identify, to grasp a unified meaning through thought, but Descartes sees identifying as inseparable from distinguishing, from separating the same from the other. On the other hand, with Kant, to identify is to join together, a connecting synthesis of perception with concepts in the mind. This joining together has to do with what Kant has already separated: he begins with the presupposition that there is a distinction between sensibility and understanding, the processes of receiving and thinking. The senses and the understanding are two different "stems" of knowledge in the mind. Kant also presupposes a distinction between transcendental and empirical reality, a distinction which created the "Copernican reversal" of seeing objects conforming to our knowledge rather than the other way around.

---

[36] Ibid., 36.

When Kant talks about the "synthesis of a manifold," he referred to the organization of the sensations of objects into concepts and categories in the mind, and it is this organization which gives rise to knowledge.[37] Kant includes three types of synthesis or processes of organization: the synthesis of apprehension in intuition, the synthesis of reproduction in imagination, and the synthesis of recognition in the concept.[38] Synthesis for Kant is the result of the " 'power of imagination, a blind but indispensible function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious' (B103)."[39] Ricoeur calls attention to how the imagination is also the schematism of the understanding, that according to Kant, the imagination is "an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze" (A141/B180-181).[40]

Ricoeur describes the significance of "linking or bringing together" in Kant's theory of recognition. Ricoeur sees Kant as presenting identification as recognition as "placing into relation under the condition of time."[41] This placing into relation occurs in time, connecting the perceptions of an object with concepts in the mind, in either the form of time as permanence, succession, or simultaneity (A 176/B219).[42] Time is significant for Ricoeur, as it is within time that recognition takes places. Time is the

---

[37] Ibid., 43.

[38] Ibid., 44.

[39] Ibid., 47–48.

[40] Ibid., 49–50.

[41] Ibid., 55.

[42] Ibid., 52.

background against which the recognition as identification occurs, being able to see something reappear that had previousely disappeared and claim that "this is it, it is the same."[43] Time having passed presents a challenge to recognition, a challenge that is overcome in recognizing that this is the same object as what was known in the past.

The Limits of Kantian Recognition

Ricoeur questions the ability of the subject to accurately create or receive a representation of the object of the mind. That is, in seeking to "recognize" another—whether it be an object or a person—the process of identification is riddled with uncertainty. Neither Descartes nor Kant offer a complete picture of recognition for Ricoeur, primarily because the gap between true and false, the gap between representation and knowing, ignore the subject of change.[44] Here he discusses the impact of change on recognition.[45] Persons and objects change over time, and there is a variety of ways such things can change, and such change in time requires new occasions for recognition and identification.[46] Ricoeur explains that there are significant experiences of being-in-the-world which reveal the gap between recognition and knowing, experiences that also promote the idea of recognition as closely related to identity. Ricoeur argues that the gap between knowing and recognizing is not found in judgment but in the things themselves that are to be recognized.

---

[43] Ibid., 64.

[44] Ricoeur here draws from Husserl's *Krisis* and Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

[45] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 61–62.

[46] Ibid., 62.

Ricoeur suggests that a limit case for recognition is when change makes things unrecognizable. He gives the example of something that appears, disappears, and then reappears, as something that we recognize over the course of time as something which is the same as that which appeared before. He gives the example of house keys being lost and then found, a moment of recognizing that this is the same set of keys that I have lost. But persons also regularly come and go. These comings and goings "gives to perceptual identity an aspect of assurance… The temporal distance that disappearances stretches and distends is integrated into such identity through the very grace of otherness. Something escaping the continuity of our gaze for a time makes the reappearance of the same a small miracle."[47] The recognition of persons is of course much different than the recognition of objects. We recognize persons based on their individual features rather than generic qualities. Yet recognizing persons can be made more difficult by the passing of time, owing to the changes occurring in time to individuals via the processes of aging and circumstances. Ricoeur describes Proust's narrative in *Time Regained* wherein a writer attends a dinner in which all of the guests are persons he knows but who are nearly unrecognizable because they have aged. The objective of the tale is to enable the reader to recognize himself, creating an awareness or recognition of one's own aging and mortality. It is with this that Ricoeur makes the move from recognition as identification to recognizing oneself.

A primary theme throughout Ricoeur's discussion is that recognition is a tenuous attestation. While both Descartes and Kant present accurate knowledge as readily available given the critical use of the mind's initiative, Ricoeur highlights in both cases

---

[47] Ibid., 65.

the dangerous possibility of taking for true what is false (in the case of Descartes) and of

mis-representing the object of one's perceptions (in the case of Kant). Instead of either

approach to understanding the work of recognition as identification, Ricoeur argues for a

philosophy of being-in-the-world that is ever problematic, never totalizing, and that takes

into account the philosopher's own commitments. This philosophy of being-in-the-world

sees the work of recognition as always tenuous, always risky, at once a movement

towards an object with intentionality and simultaneously never completely grasping it.

This incompleteness points to the gap between the same and the other that

Ricoeur has described in his earlier work *Oneself as Another*, in which he talks about the

tenuous act of attestation. In this earlier work he describes attestation as a type of

certainty that marks a middle ground between the exalted cogito of Descartes and the

humiliated cogito in Nietzsche.[48] That is, the notion of attestation is a kind of belief, but

not in the sense of dogma. For Ricoeur, attestation is best likened to a form of faith in

someone or something, linking attestation with testimony: "in as much as it is in the

speech of the one giving testimony that one believes."[49] In this way, because attestation is

linked with testimony, there is also a clear sense in which it is fragile: the testimony of

one can always be proven false. Hence, such a discourse based on attestation is

vulnerable, "vulnerability expressed in permanent threat of suspicion."[50] At the same

time, there is the possibility of belief in such a testimony, even risking its falsehood, and

the fact that there is true testimony lends to the work of attestation a form of credence.

This credence or trust is a response to the extreme of suspicion found in the work of

---

[48] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 22.

Nietzsche. "This trust will, in turn, be a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative: 'It's me here.'"[51] In this way, for Ricoeur, attestation is fundamentally attestation of the self, the assurance of being oneself and not another. Thus, this middle way finds itself between the self-foundational knowledge of Descartes' cogito and the humiliation of the episteme of Nietzsche, a "credence without guarantee, trust greater than suspicion," a hermeneutics of the self, equal distance from Descartes and Nietzsche.[52] This hermeneutics of the self for Ricoeur is not an understanding of the self in isolation from the other, as indeed the title of his book *Oneself as Another* emphasizes the intimate connection between the self and other.[53] He writes: "selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other."[54]

Thus, in this initial set of reflections on recognition as identification, we find in Ricoeur's discussion of recognition-identification a fragility similar to the hermeneutics of the self from his earlier work *Oneself as Another*. The attestation of recognition-identification is connected to the attestation of self-recognition, which leads us towards the moment of mutual recognition in relationship with others. Also similar to the rule-based polysemy found in the lexical account of the word "recognition," we see in

---

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 23.

[53] This is also the basis for Ricoeur's rejoinder to Levinas, which is expressed most fully in *Oneself as Another*, and that, due to limitations of space, I will not be able to outline in further depth here.

[54] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

Ricoeur's philosophical analysis thus far a movement of recognition-identification, to self-recognition, and finally to mutual recognition.

Ricoeur on Recognition of the Self

The questions posed by both Ricoeur's lexical analysis, as well as the first of his reflections on the philosophies of recognition, point towards the self-reflexivity involved in understanding the processes of recognition. To understand the concept of recognition as Riceour explores it involves the "bringing together" of this understanding with something one already knows. In my case, and hopefully in the case of the readers of this dissertation, this linking together leads me to read these reflections on recognition as similar to the process of interpreting racism. The self-reflexivity in my own cognitive processing of Ricoeur's material points to the next stage Ricoeur addresses in his philosophical analysis, that of self-recognition. Ricoeur begins his chapter on self-recognition with an introductory paragraph, setting the stage for what is to come:

> The road to recognition is long, for the 'acting and suffering' human being, that leads to the recognition that he or she is in truth a person 'capable' of different accomplishments. What is more, this self-recognition requires, at each step, the help of others, in the absence of that mutual, fully reciprocal recognition that will make each of those involved a 'recognized being,' as will be shown in my next chapter. The self-recognition at issue in the current chapter will remain not only incomplete, as in truth mutual recognition will, but also more mutilated, owing to the persistent dissymmetry of the relation to others on the model of helping, but also as a real hindrance.[55]

In these opening lines Ricoeur asserts that self-recognition involves the recognition of one's capabilities or capacity to act in the world, that self-recognition (and mutual

---

[55] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 69.

recognition which will be addressed later) is always incomplete, and that it requires the help of others at each step.

In continuing with his theme of marking the trajectory in philosophical discourse of the use of "recognition," Ricoeur starts with some of the earliest philosophical reflections on self-recognition exemplified in writings from ancient Greece. Following Bernard Williams, Ricoeur sees in these writings earlier examples of our current understandings of self-reflection, though without the radical centering of the self as seen in the work of Descartes. Quoting Williams, Ricoeur states that these ancient Greeks are "our cultural ancestors, and our view of them is intimately connected to our view of ourselves."[56] Williams' work looked at the ancient Greeks in a way that did not condescend by asserting how far we had progressed from that time but rather appreciated the similarities between then and now in terms of how we view ourselves and our reflections on the just. Ricoeur suggests that the self-recognition evidenced in Greek epic and tragedies as well as in the work of Aristotle demonstrate a trajectory of thought-events from self-recognition to ethical ideas. Again, following Williams, Ricoeur characterizes this as "recognizing responsibility," connecting self-recognition themes in the works of the ancient Greeks with their reflections on justice and discovering oneself as capable of acting justly.

Recognition in Ancient Greek Literature

Ricoeur first takes a look at the character of Ulysses in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. Ricoeur justifies this initial move by pointing out that Aristotle's reflections and

---

[56] Ibid., 70 citing; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

theories of justice in his *Nichomachean Ethics* were drawn from Homeric characters.

Ricoeur chooses Ulysses particularly because of the narrative of making himself

recognized in the context of returning to his home after being gone. Ricoeur emphasizes

that Ulysses demonstrates self-recognition or making oneself recognized and not *mutual*

recognition as will be discussed in the next chapter. He says this is because Ulysses' is

the only identity that is in question, and the response to Ulysses being recognized is the

vengeful regaining of his role as master over the land. Ricoeur highlights this violent

trajectory in Ulysses' making himself recognized as not included in the later discussion

of the struggle for recognition, that this vengeance and violence mark this story as a

problematic example of making oneself recognized.

At the same time, Ricoeur uses the story because of the ways it helpfully

exemplifies the delayed progression of recognition, verbal formulas for recognition, and

the role of marks and disguises along the way to being recognized. For example, in

Ulysses' encounter with his son, the first instance in which he is recognized, Ricoeur

notes the verbal exchange: "No, I am not a god…No, I am your father." With this

example, Ricoeur extracts that "To make oneself recognized is first to give rise to a

mistake, then to correct it."[57] The next instance in which Ulysses is recognized by another

human being is when the servant washing his feet notices his scars which have hitherto

been covered by his disguises. In the later instances, being recognized by his wife

Penelope and lastly his father, Laertes, there is the exchange of secret knowledge that

enables these others to recognize Ulysses as himself. Again, Ricoeur emphasizes that

these are not instances of mutual recognition because they are focused on the one

---

[57] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 73.

protagonist and because they are limited by his role as master. In being recognized as master, Ulysses regains mastery in a display of cruelty by massacring the usurpers. Ricoeur again states that this is not an example of the struggle for recognition, but this story has value for its use of marks and disguises in the story of recognition.

The next example Ricoeur takes from *Oedipus at Colonus*, the second of two Greek tragedies about Oedipus, the first being *Oedipus the King* which ends with Oedipus gouging out his eyes upon learning that he had killed his father and married his mother. Ricoeur describes how self-recognition happens in both *Oedipus* tragedies, but while the first recognition led to the experience of suffering, the second recognition led to the bearing of such suffering through a retraction of responsibility. That is, while Oedipus accepted responsibility when he recognized in horror, "I did this!", in this second tragedy, he says, "I did this unwillingly!," declaring his innocence. In both cases, Ricoeur points out, he remains the author of his actions:

> …[T]he tragic character, however overwhelmed he may be by the feeling of the irresistible character of the supernatural forces that govern human destiny, remains the author of that innermost action consisting of his evaluating his acts, particularly retrospectively. If misfortune is the dominant notes in *Oedipus at Colonus,* to the point of refuting the ancient guilt, this misfortune becomes a dimension of the action itself, in the sense of being endured in a responsible manner. Across this trajectory of endurance, the play builds a progression from misfortune undergone to misfortune assumed. It is the reversal from accusation to exculpation that gives a rhythm to this inner progression in endurance.[58]

Whereas in Oedipus the King, Oedipus had taken responsibility for killing his father and committing incest with his mother, and proceeds to gouge his eyes out, in this second play he puts the responsibility on the Furies who cursed him in the first place. Oedipus declares that he did not will to do these things and thus discharges his guilt onto the gods.

---

[58] Ibid., 77.

Ricoeur notes that in both plays "it is the same suffering human being who recognizes himself as agent."[59] This reflection on the sameness of the suffering human being who in both plays has recognized himself as agent, is an allusion to Ricoeur's future move in this chapter to discussing identity in its dialectic of *ipse* and *idem*, or self and sameness. In Ricoeur's discussion of Ulysses and Oedipus, the narrative format of these characters help present the complex nature of self-recognition. In Ulysses, the character of self-recognition is through refuting misrecognition and exhibiting unique scars and sharing secret knowledge. In Oedipus, self-recognition occurs in the process of imputing to oneself wrongdoing and taking responsibility for one's actions, being able to proclaim "I did this unwillingly" while still maintaining one's agency. It is this last theme, of recognizing responsibility, that launches Ricoeur into a discussion of Aristotle, and the connecting of the virtues to self-recognition.

Aristotle: The Role of the Virtues in Self-Recognition

Ricoeur highlights Aristotle's role in the history of the philosophy of recognition for his emphasis on persons' ability to recognize themselves as responsible agents, able to act responsibly. Aristotle develops his ethics with consideration for the ultimate goal of human life, which is the sense of a fulfilled life, one that has as its highest aim that of happiness. While there are different opinions as to what "happiness" is, says Aristotle, happiness remains the goal towards which all human action is oriented. In order to move towards this goal, Aristotle proposes that the virtuous life is the most efficient mode of attaining happiness. Ricoeur reflects on Aristotle's work that

---

[59] Ibid., 79.

> With this [the concept of virtues as leading us towards happiness], the idea that happiness comes only through divine favor or luck is excluded. Happiness has its source in us, in our activities. Here lies the most primitive condition of what we call self-recognition. Its deepest-lying possibility is its anchorage in the goal of happiness in those activities that make up the human task as such, our task.[60]

Thus, Ricoeur secures Aristotle's place as among the forerunners of our concept of self-recognition in his connecting our human action with our happiness, the beginnings of a move towards self-reflexivity. We see this most decisively in the move from the character virtues to the intellectual virtues in which the *phronimos* or wise person, exemplifies the self-reflexive nature of recognizing responsibility. Ricoeur quotes Aristotle: "From what we have said, virtue is a habitual state that directs decision making which consists in a golden mean relative to us, one whose norm is the moral rule; that is, the one that would be given by the wise man [*phronimos*]."[61]

Ricoeur explains that the *phronimos* or wise man "will be the anticipated figure of the reflexive self implied by the recognition of responsibility. It is not stated that he designates himself. But the complete definition of virtue does designate him as the living measure of excess and deficiency, the dividing line that marks out the mean that is characteristic of all virtue."[62] Ricoeur takes the *phronimos* as an example of the self-reflexive nature of recognizing responsibility. Ricoeur states: "recognition of responsibility, whose outline we have caught sight of in epic and tragedy, finds its guiding concept in that of decision."[63] The practical wisdom exemplified by the wise

---

[60] Ibid., 81.

[61] Ibid., 83 citing; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indiapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 1106b36–38.

[62] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 83.

person comes only as a result of this deliberation as to the right course of action and accepting one's capacity to act.

Ricoeur's Phenomenology of the Capable Human Being

The capacity to act is one of the four elements involved in what Ricoeur terms a "phenomenology of the capable human being." The four elements begin with the capacity to speak, then to act, then to narrate oneself, and finally, "imputability," or taking responsibility for one's actions. Ricoeur begins not with the capacity to act but in the capacity to speak because of the implicit capacities inherent to speech, exemplified in the work of J.L. Austin concerning "speech acts," in the sense that we truly "do things with words." The statement in itself expresses a referential movement, demonstrating the three elements of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self: the capacity to act in speaking, the detour through the object in the "what" of the statement in order to get to the "who" as in "who is speaking," but all this in the context of the speech event which expects a hearing or is itself a response to an other, the interlocutory nature of speech. Thus, the speaking event exemplifies this prior capability of self-reflexivity that we will see in the next elements of acting, narrating, and taking responsibility.

The next element, the "I can" of action itself, demonstrates the ability to make events happen in one's physical or social environment, as well as enabling the person to see oneself as the cause of such events, able to say: "I did it."[64] At the same time, intentions are not a part of this causal impact. The agent remains the cause regardless of

---

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 96.

one's intentions, as seen in the tragedy of Oedipus. Because of this separation of intentions from causality, with causality remaining connected to the agent regardless of intentionality, the agent's ability to cause an event is not the same as being able to take responsibility for that event in the sense of "imputability." Rather, Ricoeur describes this capacity to act as the ability to *begin* a series of fragmentary actions, the wholeness of such ability found only in the narrative given to the actions, uniting them into a whole.

Ricoeur also reminds us at this point of the inextricable nature of actions with those of other actors. In situations where it is not clear which of the acting agents initiated the string of actions, the avowal of the initiating actor is necessary. This, though, requires one to be able to narrate oneself as the acting agent in such a string of events. This connects with the next element in Ricoeur's phenomenology, which is the capacity to narrate and to narrate oneself. Ricoeur highlights how this is seen in everyday language: "the reflexive form of talking about oneself narratively, personal identity is projected as a narrative identity."[65] In this setting, the speaking human being reveals himself as the acting human being, as well as the narrating human being.

Here Ricoeur draws from his earlier work in *Time and Narrative* in which he describes the work of Aristotle's *Poetics*, particularly the concept of emplotment or *muthos*. Ricoeur describes it this way in his current work, introducing it as such:

> 'emplotment' (*muthos*) aimed at the 'representation' (*mimesis*) of action. Emplotment confers an intelligible configuration on a heterogenous collection composed of intentions, causes, and contingencies. The unity of meaning that results rests on the dynamic equilibrium between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances that, up to the close of the narrative, put in peril this identity of a unique kind.[66]

---

[65] Ibid., 99.

Ricoeur explains that what is true of the plot is also true of the characters, in that it is not just events that are brought together by the plot, but the characters themselves become "emplotted," in that the inevitable changes to one's character over time are held together in the process of telling the story. In this way, Ricoeur describes the "narrative identity" that poses both the problem and the solution to the dialectic of *ipse* and *idem*, or selfhood and sameness. That is, Ricoeur has identified as a problem the temporal elements of the self and one's actions, while one's self is changing over time, and yet one's identity also endures over time. The concept of "narrative identity" connects the discordance of action with the concordance conferred by emplotment. Narrative identity helps solve the problem of the selfhood/sameness dialectic, "the immutable identity of the *idem*, the same and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition."[67] Examples of this dialectic include the fact that our identity across our lives involves some constants or sameness, such as a genetic code, fingerprints, physical characteristics by which persons can identify us as who we are, such as Ulysses' scars. At the same time, our characters are also transformed through time, in some cases to such an extent that we become nearly unrecognizable to others, unrecognizable as "the same" person.[68]

Ricoeur argues that our everyday ordinary experiences oscillate between sameness and ipseity, and that aiming for a "narrative unity of life," as in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, is often fraught with difficulties and confrontations.[69] Ricoeur agrees

---

[66] Ibid., 100.

[67] Ibid., 101.

[68] Ibid., 102.

with MacIntyre's assessment that the work of the good life includes working towards this

narrative unity, but he also highlights the inherent difficulty to such a unity. Such

difficulties that threaten the narrative unity of the individual involving interactions with

others, including challenges to one's personal narrative as well as the possibility of the

manipulation of collective narratives. Riceour begins by asserting that the stories of

individuals are always also stories about others. We are "caught up in interwoven stories"

between ourselves and others, and it is in "the test of confronting others…that narrative

identity reveals its fragility."[70] Indeed, amidst powerful ideologies, the narrative identities

of persons and collective groups can be manipulated. Ricoeur notes that "every

collectivity is qualified to say 'we' on the occasion of particular operations of

remembering."[71] If we are able to re-narrate our identities both individually and

collectively, then such a collective "we" can be dangerously employed when used to

manipulate others. Thus, narrative identity is fraught with difficulties, even as "narrating

oneself" remains a central component of what it means to be a capable human being.

The fourth element in Ricoeur's phenomenology of the capable human being is

"imputability," or the ability to recognize responsibility for one's actions. Ricoeur

describes it this way: "being able to bear the consequences of one's acts, in particular of

those taken as faults, wrongs, in which another is reputed to have been the victim."[72]

Thus, imputability includes "attributing a blamable action to someone as its actual

---

[69] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[70] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 104.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 105.

author."[73] And yet, Ricoeur does not want to remain purely juridical in this sense of attributing blame, and so he addresses how "the idea of responsibility shields that of imputability from its purely juridical reduction."[74] That is, in emphasizing responsibility, Ricoeur is calling attention to the agent's ability to claim the wrongdoing, not waiting for an external judge to proclaim one is "guilty." Rather, recognizing responsibility moves imputability away from the objectification of damage done and into the realm of considering those who have been harmed in the process. Whereas in the penal system, the consequences include imposing suffering on the agent who has harmed another or who has rejected the law, the concept of imputability and self-designation are re-orientated towards the "real or potential victims of a violent act." Here the emphasis changes from damage done to the vulnerable others. This is not to attribute infinite responsibility, but neither is this fleeing responsibility, as Ricoeur seeks to offer "imputability" as a form of attestation of one's acknowledgement of wronging others.

Ricoeur on Memory and Promises

Ricoeur extends the concept of human capacity by discussing the role of memory and promises in self-recognition. He writes: "In memory and promises, the problematic of self-recognition reaches two high points simultaneously. The one is turned toward the past, the other towards the future. But they need to be considered together within the living present of self-recognition, thanks to several features they have in common."[75]

---

[73] Ibid., 106.

[74] Ibid., 107.

[75] Ibid., 109.

Promises and memory, though they are directed towards opposing temporal realities, are both only actualized in the present moment.[76] It is only "now" that one recalls a memory or makes a promise. It is only in the "now" that both memory and promises are actualized: I remember a past event *now*, and I am making a promise about my future action *now* to you. Another similarity is that they both are threatened, and the threat to each constitutes part of its meaning. For memory, the threat is forgetting, and for promises, the threat is betrayal. In each of these cases, the meaning of the capability would not hold the same value were it not for the very real possibility of either forgetfulness or betrayal. Ricoeur writes "to remember is not to forget; to keep one's promise is not to break it. This shadow of the negative will accompany us…"[77]

Ricoeur examines the significance of memory through several theorists, beginning with Aristotle who noted the enigma of memory as an image of the past brought to mind as a presence of an absent thing. In Aristotle's work, there are two kinds of memory, one of an unsought-after image arising in one's mind from the past, and the other of a more active attempt to remember something of the past. This move towards active remembering Aristotle termed *anamnesis*. Such active remembering is required because of the problem of forgetting. Memories can be forgotten as an expression of a bad conscience in the deliberate act of forgetting, in such a way as to give "the work of memory its dramatic character."[78]

---

[76] Ricoeur's reflections on promises and time appeared earlier in his work discussing Augustine's view of time in relation to God in Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*.

[77] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 110.

[78] Ibid., 112.

Ricoeur's primary conversation partner here is Henri Bergson. Bergson connects for Ricoeur the concepts of memory and self-recognition. Ricoeur quotes Bergson, saying "the concrete process by which we grasp the past in the present is recognition."[79] Ricoeur highlights the way Bergson has addressed this enigma of memory, by which some image from the past is recognized as *memory* in the present moment. In speaking of the images of memory, Bergson uses the term "traces", where the three kinds of traces of the past in the present are the results of cortical traces in the neural tubes of the brain, mental traces of sense experiences, and finally, the documentary traces whereby private or public archives hold images as sources of memory. Again, the threat of forgetting looms over these traces, in that these traces can be wiped away. How is it that such images are recalled and not forgotten? Ricoeur calls the hard work of memory a "small miracle" when it succeeds in bringing about "the present representation of something absent. Recognition is the effective resolution of this enigma of the presence of an absence, thanks to the certitude that accompanies it: 'It's the one—yes, it is!' This is what makes recognition the mnemonic act par excellence."[80]

Ricoeur draws from the work of John Locke to describe the role of recollection in the formation of identity. One's consciousness makes oneself a "self," and it is memory that gives such consciousness a temporal identity. Quoting Locke: "As far back as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same

---

[79] Ibid., 125; citing Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 90.

[80] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 124–125.

self…that the action was done."[81] In this statement from Locke, Ricoeur highlights how memory represents the "idem" aspect of identity, or sameness. There is in memory an aspect of recalling the same—I am the same person who experienced this memory in the past. Memory gives to one's history a sense of "mineness."

In contrast to the past-ness of memory, and the *idem*-ness of memory on the dialectic of identity, Ricoeur poses the promise as a complementary capacity. That is, the promise is future-oriented, and it is in the promise that one commits to being true to one's word in spite of the changes that may occur to oneself over time. The *ipseity* of promises complements the *idem* or sameness of memory. For promises, this *ipseity:* "consists in a will to self-constancy, to remaining true to form, which seals the story of a life confronted with changes."[82] Thus, for Ricoeur, the opposition and complementarity of the promise and memory give a "temporal breadth to self-recognition, founded on both a life history and commitments about the long-term future."[83]

The past and present of memory and promises are also involved in the concept of reliability. Promising involves a self that commits to being reliable in spite of all that might tempt one to break one's word. This reliability connects promising with the act of testimony, in that both in testimony and promises, the perceived reliability of the person giving the testimony or making the promise is based upon his or her past ability to keep one's word.[84] Thus, the memory of others concerning the unreliability of the one making

---

[81] Ibid., 121; quoting John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover, 1959), 1:449.

[82] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 129.

[83] Ibid., 127.

promises prevents the current promise from being trusted. This again reminds us of the negative side of both memory and promises, in that memories can be forgotten and promises can be broken.

In a rare moment of prescription, Ricoeur offers four suggestions for the problem of broken promises. He first advises that persons not promise too much, following the adage "nothing in excess." Secondly, he argues for the need for a "creative fidelity," following the work of Gabriel Marcel, in putting distance between the constancy of an obstinate will and the concept of self-constancy. Instead, rather we ought to have greater patience towards others and ourselves. Thirdly, he suggests putting the priority on the beneficiary of one's promises, considering the vulnerability of those others to whom one has committed oneself. Fourth, Ricoeur suggests that we put our own promises within the greater context of those promises which have been made to us, acknowledging a history of promises to which we are indebted.[85]

Capacities as Ethical and Social

Ricoeur returns to the theme of "capacities" by highlighting the way this term has been taken up by economist Amartya Sen in depicting a new understanding of social justice. Ricoeur points out that Sen has connected the concept of capacities with that of rights, in arguing for a new way of understanding social responsibility. Sen draws from Isaiah Berlin's notion of two kinds of liberty: positive and negative, where the negative form of liberty simply entails the removal of hindrances to one's freedom, whereas the

---

[84] Ibid., 130–131.

[85] Ibid., 133–134.

positive form of freedom presupposes such removal but furthermore secures the liberty

needed to accomplish everything an individual has the capacity to accomplish. Because

the work of civil rights in the United States has eliminated many of the hindrances to

liberty, Sen would identify this as the "negative" form of freedom. The positive form of

freedom would look something like what he observed in India, where the poorest were

given a steady salary or public employment, a system that prevented the occurrence of

famines which had previously effected the country regularly. Such policies allow for the

positive expression of freedom, which is the full development of each person's individual

capabilities.[86] An individual's capabilities also include the responsible use of such

positive freedom, such as the evaluation of public policies with an eye towards increasing

the positive freedom and capabilities of all persons. Thus, the social practice of

evaluating social justice both requires individual freedom and must seek to preserve the

individual freedom of others, most notably in opening up the opportunity for all persons

to be able to fully realize their own capabilities. Ricoeur states such evaluation becomes a

social responsibility within an ethical system that sees in human capabilities not a neutral

concept but one that demands to be recognized. It is thus that Ricoeur links up social

responsibility with the recognition of one's responsibility towards others.

In summation, Ricoeur depicts self-recognition by way of analyzing individual

capacities such as the capacity to speak, act, narrate oneself, impute responsibility for

oneself, as well as the capacity to remember and to promise. These capacities have

moved the discussion towards social capacities by calling attention to the interpersonal

nature of these capacities, seen most clearly in the contribution of Amartya Sen in

---

[86] Ibid., 144; Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

acknowledging the social responsibility towards ensuring individuals' capabilities are free to be actualized.[87] In his analysis of phenomenology of the capable human being, Ricoeur asserts that recognition of the self involves speaking, acting, narrating, and imputability, all which take place in the presence of others, and which involve the processes of memory and the making of promises to and for others, moving the concept of self-recognition towards mutual recognition. If it is only ever in the presence of others that the recognition of one's own capabilities takes place, then the recognition of responsibility for one's own capacities leads one to the ethical consideration of the other. By connecting self-recognition to the ethical life, in which one acknowledges the self's responsibility to ensure that all others have the positive liberty to use their capabilities to the fullest, Ricoeur moves the discussion of recognition towards the political realm.

Ricoeur on Mutual Recognition

Ricoeur introduces the third philosophical meaning of "recognition" by connecting it with the two previous philosophical meanings. He summarizes that the recognition of something in general involves the attempt to distinguish the same from the other, to say that this object is the same one and not another. The risk in this stage is that of making a mistake. In the second kind of recognition, the process of identification shifts towards the identity of the self. While the dialectic between the same and the other still exists, as seen in Ricoeur's *idem* and *ipseity* paradox, the emphasis is still on the "same," emblematically seen in Locke's depiction of the self as itself and no other, in which identity is opposed to diversity. While the dialectic between same and other has fallen

---

[87] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 148.

more decidedly on the side of the "same" in the processes of identifying objects in general and in the self, in looking at human capabilities we have moved to the other, where notions of the self necessarily involve the other such as the intersubjective aspect of speech, promises, and finally, social responsibility. This transition toward and explicit connection between recognition of the self and mutual recognition Ricoeur has previously stated in his *Oneself as Another*:

> If I had to name a category that corresponded to the categories of imputability and responsibility…I would choose the term *recognition*, so dear to Hegel in the Jena period and throughout the subsequent course of his work. Recognition is a structure of the self reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice.[88]

Thus, recognition leads us to consider the subject of justice, which requires an examination of the political structure in which persons interact with one another. It is via an analysis of political philosophy drawn from the theme of recognition that Ricoeur bridges the personal and the political in his discussion.

The History of "Mutual Recognition": Thomas Hobbes as Precursor to Hegel

Ricoeur examines the work of Hegel and his successors through the theme of the "struggle for recognition" as they have responded to Hobbesian political theory. Ricoeur first discusses the work of Thomas Hobbes as posing the challenge to which Hegel responds. Hobbes' *Leviathan* presented the "thought experiment" of human beings apart from governance as being in "a war of all against all" driven by innate instincts towards competition, distrust, and glory. These instincts are only overcome by a greater fear of one's own death, leading to a rational calculation and concession towards a social

---

[88] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 296.

contract. It is ultimately out of the fear of a violent death that humans seek to secure a

peaceful settlement with others, creating a social contract in order to preserve one's own

life.[89] Such a contract requires that all persons ought to endeavor peace while being able

to defend themselves, allowing others the same rights which requires each person give up

some amount of personal power so that all can share in the same rights. An example of

this is the political structure of state representation, in which persons transfer power to a

representative to make decisions on behalf of the people.

Ricoeur remarks that Hobbes presents this voluntarism of entering into a contract

as going so far as becoming a gift. In depicting Hobbes' contract, Ricoeur explains:

> But although it is a matter of relinquishing something, of a transfer, of a contract,
> it in no way amounts to a moral constraint, but rather is a question of an entirely
> voluntary and sovereign precaution that calculation recommends under the
> pressure of fear. That one relinquishes one's right can go so far as to become a
> gratuitous gift, that is, one without reciprocity, thereby exceeding any possible
> contract: 'This is not contract, but Gift, Free-Gift, Grace, words that signify one
> and the same thing' (82), Hobbes notes.[90]

This interest in Hobbes' depiction of the contract as involving a gratuitous gesture alludes

to Ricoeur's consideration of "recognition" an involving gratitude, a theme he will turn to

later in this discussion.

Ricoeur pauses a moment to critique Hobbes for a lack of attention to alterity.

That is, the relinquishment of power as part of the social contract remains rooted in an

"arbitrary voluntarism" out of the fear of a violent death, absent any real reference to

---

[89] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 163–170.

[90] Ibid., 167; citing Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668 (Indiapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1994), 82.

others as constitutive of the self.[91] That is, Hobbes sees persons consenting to the social

contract out of a fear of violent death, such a fear that overcomes the initial impulses to

conquer others out of a vanity and greed, an overcoming that enables one to give up some

power even gratuitously. Ricoeur challenges what he sees as a naturalist interpretation for

the sources of the political state, instead arguing for a clearer articulation of the role of

intersubjectivity in the procedures of transferring power, contracting, and covenanting

with others.[92] Ricoeur argues that such procedures which have moved beyond the

presumed "state of nature" require a self-identification that includes alterity.[93] Ricoeur

moves from his analysis of Hobbes as a precursor to Hegel, into the ways Hegel's early

philosophy became the foundation for current conceptions of mutual recognition,

particularly as seen in the work of Axel Honneth.

The History of "Mutual Recognition" Continued: Hegel and the Struggle for Recognition

Ricoeur then examines how G. W. F. Hegel's concept of the struggle for

recognition in his Jena writings responds to Hobbes' political theory.[94] There are three

components to Hegel's theory that Ricoeur sees as responding to Hobbes. First, Hegel

makes more explicit the link between self-reflection and an orientation towards the other.

Hegel argues that human nature is inherently interpersonal, contra the views of

Machiavelli and Hobbes who assumed human nature intrinsically aimed for self-

---

[91] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 170.

[92] Ibid., 162.

[93] Ibid., 171.

[94] Ibid.

preservation.[95] Contrary to these earlier thinkers, Hegel in his Jena writings describes the conflict between persons not as self-interested but as a struggle for recognition, necessarily requiring interpersonal relationships.[96] Second, Hegel makes a similar move from the negative to the positive, "from disregard towards consideration, from injustice towards respect."[97] Ricoeur likens this to Hobbes' starting point of the struggle to the death. Persons come into conflict with others when they feel they have not been recognized as full human beings.[98] Third, like the Hobbesian contract, Hegel's theory entails a systematic aspect, which for Hegel is the institutionalization of recognition. This struggle for recognition leads to the moral development of a society as it begins to broaden its understanding of who is a full member of its community. Conflict, then, represents a way of integrating and broadening a community.[99] Such institutionalization of recognition would not be static nor immutable. Rather, the efforts to systematize recognition must be continually revised according to the discovery of additional forms of misrecognition.

---

[95] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 8–10.

[96] Ibid., 5; citing G. W. F. Hegel, "Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit," in *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary*, trans. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

[97] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 171.

[98] While Ricoeur emphasizes negativity as a similar motivation in the theories of Hobbes and Hegel, Axel Honneth lifts up the moral dimension of this struggle. Persons come into conflict not out of an anti-ethical vanity but a moral sense of what it means to be fully human. Ricoeur's likening Hegel and Hobbes in this way seems to overlook this important nuance. See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 28.

[99] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 28.

Axel Honneth's Renewal of Hegel's "Recognition": Love, Rights, and Solidarity

Ricoeur expresses his appreciation for the work of Axel Honneth and presents what he terms a "dialogue" with Honneth.[100] Ricoeur's later discussion on gift-giving and gratitude in some ways depart from Honneth's work on recognition, yet Honneth's work remains a significant contribution to the philosophical discussion on recognition. Ricoeur focuses on Honneth's depiction of three models of intersubjective recognition and their corresponding forms of disrespect. The three-fold pattern of these models echoes Ricoeur's analysis of the "rule-based polysemy" of the lexical definitions of recognition, in that like the dictionary accounts, these three models also seem to connect to and flow out of one another.

Honneth's work relies on the early writings of Hegel at Jena, as well as the social psychology of George Herbert Mead, who shares with Hegel an interpretation of social conflict over recognition as a structuring force in the moral development of society. Mead is significant to Honneth's argument, because he comes from a scientific perspective (Honneth wants to leave behind Hegel's metaphysics of "Spirit" and the Absolute) to argue that interpersonal relationships shape personal identity.[101] With the help of Mead, Honneth argues that human development requires the recognition of others, and when we refuse to recognize another, we are jeopardizing our ability to recognize ourselves in a similar way. That is, when I fail to love another or recognize someone as a bearer of

---

[100] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 186.

[101] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 85; citing George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1934).

certain rights, I have now limited my own ability to love myself or see myself as a bearer of such rights.

In summarizing George Herbert Mead's analysis of recognition in historical perspective, Honneth writes that:

> …normatively broadened concepts of the social community became the motivational core of social movements. The 'struggle for recognition' proceeds from the moral ideas in which charismatically endowed personalities were capable of extending the 'generalized other' of their social environment in a manner that fits with the intuitive expectations of their contemporaries. As soon as these intellectual innovations came to influence the consciousness of larger groups, a struggle for the recognition of expanded rights-claims had to emerge, one capable of putting the institutionalized order into question.[102]

Interestingly, Honneth cites Mead as mentioning Jesus as an example of one such charismatic figure who helped broaden the community, helping persons to expand their notion of "family" by including their neighbors and even strangers. Thus, Honneth's project is analyzing the work of "recognition" in helping society become more inclusive and to expand the rights of individuals within society. He also sets about to show how the negative feelings of indignation arising out of the experience of not being recognized can lead to social change.

Filial Recognition: Love

Honneth's three models of intersubjective recognition are love, rights, and solidarity.[103] "Love" as a model of intersubjective recognition involves the close relationships of family and friends, both sexual and non-sexual. Such love arises from the

---

[102] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 85.

[103] Ibid., 94.

person's earliest attachments with one's mother, as described by object relations theorist D.W. Winnicott.[104] This love manifests itself most clearly in the movement from dependence to independence, in which the child is assured of the mother's love even after the child has grown independent of the mother. This love, then, is a form of recognizing the independence of the other while still expressing love and attachment for the other.[105] Love is the first stage of mutual recognition, "because in it subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to the concrete nature of their needs and thereby recognize each other as needy creatures. In the reciprocal experience of loving care, both subjects know themselves to be united in their neediness, in their dependence on each other."[106] In relationships of mutual dependence such as familial or romantic relationships or close friendships, each person comes to see oneself as needy, as well as able to meet the needs of another.

At the same time, the mutual relationship is not marked only by dependence but also *independence*. Honneth writes that love represents "a symbiosis refracted by mutual individuation…what one recognizes in the other is evidently only the other's individual independence."[107] This loving mutual recognition then involves both mutual dependence as well as the acknowledged independence of each partner, trusting that the love between the two remains amidst and is reconfirmed by independence.

---

[104] Ibid., 98.

[105] Ibid., 107.

[106] Ibid., 95.

[107] Ibid., 107.

Hegel viewed love as a relationship of mutual recognition that confirms one's own individuality while connecting one with another in interdependence. The individual's development of a sense of identity is in fact based on this recognition by significant others. When this does not happen, both partners to the interaction suffer. The relationship of mutual recognition, on the other hand, enables both persons to see themselves as loved and as able to love. Honneth writes: "In our context, to speak of 'love' as an 'element' of ethical life can only mean that, for every subject, the experience of being loved constitutes a necessary precondition for participation in the public life of a community."[108] Here Honneth makes the direct connection between being loved and being able to participate in the life of the community. At the same time, if a person is denied another form of recognition, that of the rights and responsibilities of communal life, then one's participation is strictly limited no matter how much one has been recognized by a loving other.

Ricoeur, as part of his "dialogue" with Honneth, also notes the institutional nature of filial bonds such as the family and marriage, in which social bonds form out of one's lineage and in turn are formed by having children.[109] In connecting this first form of mutual recognition with his own reflections on identity, Ricoeur notes that such familial bonds also initiate one's own social identity. He discusses under the heading "Recognizing Oneself in One's Lineage" a reflection on the transmission of a legacy when a child is born into a family:

---

[108] Ibid., 38.

[109] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 192.

one is, by the very fact of being born, assigned a fixed place in one's lineage. This, before any egological self-awareness, is what confers an identity on me in the eyes of civil institutions… My birth made me a priceless object, something outside of ordinary commerce. …In one sense, every birth welcomed is an adoption, not only by the father but also by the mother…Both these adoptions were authorized by the system transmitting a family name and choosing a given name for me."[110]

In reflecting in this way on the implications of filial love that result in bearing and raising children, Ricoeur links this form of love as mutual recognition to the other models of recognition: juridical and social. There is a system of laws that institutionalize the family and order things such as the giving of names to children, and there are laws governing the protection of individuals within families. Thus, the filial commitment to others is not separate from the legal connection to these others. Additionally, familial connections impact one's social esteem, for instance when one's family name brings about a certain prestige. Conversely, one's lineage can also negatively impact social esteem if one's progenitors are viewed in a less than favorable light. Thus, in Ricoeur's contribution to this "dialogue" with Honneth, he is already linking this first model of recognition with the other two models within Honneth's categories.

Legal Recognition: Rights

Legal recognition involves a person's legal rights and responsibilities as a full member of the community and full citizen of the larger society. But recognizing persons in the legal sense involves more than including them in the community, it means granting them the same rights and responsibilities as other members. Honneth critiques Mead here

---

[110] Ibid., 193.

for a lack of clarity, in that increasing individual freedoms can mean members of a community receiving expanded rights, or increasing the circle of who can be considered a member of the community and expanding this circle to include those currently outside.[111] Both actions are necessary in legally recognizing others: granting full membership and insuring all share the same rights and responsibilities as other members.

In this sphere of legal recognition, persons recognize one another as morally responsible and hence extend to one another the rights of citizenry. These rights have been categorized into individual, public and social, elsewhere called negative and positive rights. That is, individual rights include the right to liberty that negatively prevent others from hindering one's expression of such liberty. Public and social rights include the guarantee of basic human welfare that are expressed positively in the sense of freedom to participate in public deliberations of governance and enable one to pursue a fair share of the distribution of public goods.[112] Ricoeur notes that for Hegel, one significant right was the right to own property, and so recognition on the juridical plane meant not only the right to own property but also the recognition of others as property owners. This, in turn, would be enforced by the state by declaring stealing a crime.[113] Thus, this form of recognition requires certain material conditions: that persons be able to own material goods.[114]

---

[111] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 85–86.

[112] Ibid., 115.

[113] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 196.

[114] By highlighting the material conditions for recognition, Ricoeur makes Honneth appear to be less far from the work of Nancy Fraser regarding the necessity of analyzing class and economics as well as social esteem. See Fraser's debate with Honneth in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, (Brooklyn: Verso, 2003).

Thus in legal recognition, persons are recognized as bearers of rights and members of the community, a status that also represents moral responsibility. Ricoeur expounds upon Honneth's discussion of responsibility by drawing connections between responsibility and capabilities: "Responsibility can be taken…as the capacity recognized by both society and oneself."[115] Responsibility thus connects the individual with the larger society in that it connotes self-assertion as well as the recognition of the rights of others.

Ricoeur also notes the parallels between the first two forms of recognition in terms of interpersonal relationships. With recognition as love, each individual maintained a capacity to be alone as well as a trust that the other who had departed would return. In legal recognition, in response to others, each individual is free and maintains respect for one another.[116] Ricoeur adds:

> In this sense, recognition intends two things: the other person and the norm. As regards the norm, it signifies, in the lexical sense of the word, to take as valid, to assert validity; as regards the person, recognition means identifying each person as free and equal to every other person. …These two dimensions of juridical recognition thus consist in the connection between the enlarging of the sphere of rights recognized as belonging to persons and the enriching of the capacities that these subjects recognize in themselves.[117]

For Ricoeur, this recognition on the juridical plane involves an enlarging of the capacities of the individual as well as the recognition of the equal rights of others, citing Honneth as stating "we can only come to understand ourselves as the bearers of rights when we

---

[115] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 200.

[116] Ibid., 197.

[117] Ibid., 197–198.

known, in turn, what various normative obligations we must keep vis-à-vis others."[118] Juridical recognition then enables persons to see themselves as having certain capabilities and rights as they acknowledge responsibility to respect others' rights.

Social Recognition: Solidarity

The third form of recognition is that of solidarity or social esteem. This differs from other forms of mutual recognition previously depicted in that it goes beyond the familial connections of love, and the legal rights of individuals, to the sphere of social approval for one's culture and values. Honneth explains: "Unlike modern legal recognition, social esteem is directed… at the particular qualities that characterize people in their personal difference."[119] The framework by which individuals judge their own behavior is based on the cultural self-understanding of a society: "The cultural self-understanding of a society provides the criteria that orient the social esteem of persons, because their abilities and achievements are judged intersubjectively according to the degree to which they can help to realize culturally defined values."[120] To value ways of life that do not conform to the dominant cultural "self-understanding" is to express solidarity with those who maintain differently-defined cultural values. Honneth depicts this "solidarity" or social recognition as what enables persons to feel self-esteem, a sense that they in their uniqueness have something valuable to contribute to society. This differs from the love of intimate relationships or legal recognition in that it relies on a

---

[118] Ibid., 197; citing Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 108.

[119] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 122.

[120] Ibid.

broader understanding of one's self-perception in society at large. That is, amidst the personal differences across individuals, there is a consistent need to feel one's own contributions and accomplishments are valued. This includes the self-perception of how one's differences are accepted and acknowledged as significant by others in society.

Ricoeur explores the complexity of this model of recognition due to the "axiological pluralism" of cultures within a society. Citing Michael Walzer's concept of "spheres of justice", Ricoeur discusses the variety of cultural judgments and standards made within different contexts.[121] He writes: "The notions that go with social esteem, such as prestige or consideration, do not escape the axiological pluralism that results from the variety of such mediations. As a result, social esteem does not escape the interpretive conditions corresponding to the symbolic character of such social mediations."[122] That is, there are different ways of judging value because such judgments require interpretation based on standards for excellence that vary in different contexts. Ricoeur points out that there is inevitably disagreement between standards of different "worlds," in which individuals operate out of different criteria for justification, criteria which contain their own internal coherence. To reach an agreement regarding judging value involves a compromise between two groups' different criteria. Ricoeur gives the example of a great orchestra director evaluating the standing of a great industrialist: how can someone from one "world" evaluate the standing of something from another world with its own set of standards? Ricoeur states that his interest lies in

---

[121] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 204; citing Michael Walzer, *Spheres Of Justice: A Defense Of Pluralism And Equality* (Basic Books, 1984).

[122] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 202.

the capacity to awaken actors of one world to the values of another world through such criticism, short of their changing worlds. A new dimension of personhood is thereby revealed, that of understanding a world other than one's own, a capacity we can compare to that of learning a foreign language to the point of being able to appreciate one's own language as one among many.[123]

The ability of persons to appreciate and understand standards of excellence from outside one's own "world" serves to enlarge persons' worlds, enabling them to see their own set of standards as one set among many. This involves a certain fragility: Ricoeur acknowledges the difficulty of suspending one's opinion, leaving one susceptible to being charged with surrendering one's principles.[124] Yet pursuit of the common good requires this kind of compromise, being able to relativize one's belonging to a given "city" without becoming disillusioned by relativism.[125]

Honneth's Depiction of Disrespect as Recognition Denied

Honneth connects the three types of mutual recognition to three forms of relation-to-self: love corresponding to basic self-confidence, rights corresponding to self-respect, and solidarity corresponding to self-esteem. Yet when a person is not recognized in these ways, these relations-to-self are negatively impacted. In each of the varying spheres of recognition, opposing experiences of misrecognition present examples of disrespect at each level, with bodily injury impacting one's ability to trust which is learned through love, the denial of rights leading one to doubt one's ability to participate in social life, and denigration of one's cultural values as an impediment to one's contribution to social

---

[123] Ibid., 209.

[124] Ibid., 209–210.

[125] Ibid., 210.

life.[126] The violation of one's body hinders one's ability to trust in one's own body, one's

own reality, drastically limiting one's self-confidence. The denial of rights prevents one

from feeling fully a part of society as a morally responsible member, leading to a lack of

self-respect. The devaluation of one's individual or collective way of life leads to a loss

of self-esteem as one senses social devaluation of one's own traits.

Honneth likens the experience of disrespect in any of these ways to death, saying

that persons can experience "social death" when recognition is withdrawn or withheld in

any of these ways. He writes: "various forms of disregard for the psychological integrity

of humans plays the same negative role that organic infections take on in the context

of…the body."[127] He states that such experiences of disrespect can result in feelings of

anger, acknowledging that one has been disrespected and not accorded the honor one

deserves, but it can also result in shame. Honneth speaks about the role of shame in

creating a sense of confusion in the person disrespected, not sure initially whether it is

oneself or the other who has caused the harm, but feeling innately less worthy than one

had previously regarded oneself.[128] The feeling of shame can be a deterrent to social

action. It is only if the person feeling ashamed can recognize in the injury the experience

of being disrespected, that one can instead be motivated to social action. Honneth argues

that social movements thus play a significant role in helping persons acknowledge certain

experiences of shame as resulting from the act of disrespect in order to spur persons thus

ashamed into social action: "only if the means of articulation of a social movement are

---

[126] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 131.

[127] Ibid., 135.

[128] Ibid., 137–138.

available can the experience of disrespect become a source of motivation for political resistance."[129] Thus, not only is it the acknowledgement, arising from the experience of shame, that one has been disrespected, but it is in the analysis provided by social movements that enable the experience of disrespect to translate into social resistance.

In this way, Honneth lifts up a positive role for these negative experiences of disrespect. Honneth argues that these negative emotions can propel persons to social action, demanding recognition from others in society. The feelings of rage, shame, hurt, indignation, can motivate a person to enter into conflict with others.[130] As mentioned before, social conflict can then be a step in the process of the society's moral development. Conflicts over the struggle for recognition can lead to an enlarged concept of the community, calling into question the institutionalization of certain forms of disrespect that deny full membership to some persons in society.

Ricoeur's Response to Honneth: Challenging "Struggle"

In his analysis of Honneth, Ricoeur points to the way Hegel's *Anerkennung* opens up a history of *struggling* for recognition, in which we are always "clearer about what is unjust than about what is just."[131] Ricoeur highlights especially the role of struggle in this process, likening this to the work of Hobbes to which Hegel was reacting. In Hegel and later in Honneth, challenging institutions requires the emotion of indignation, an emotion that plays a role similar to that of the fear of violent death in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Ricoeur

---

[129] Ibid., 139.

[130] Ibid., 136.

[131] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 173.

points out that both theories represent "the great dialectic that articulates negativity and institutionalization in terms of each other."[132] For Hegel and Honneth, the negative sense of indignation leads to changes in institutionalization, and yet institutions continue to produce feelings of indignation that lead to calls for further change. It is this reliance on the negative that Ricoeur will later question when he introduces an alternative means of understanding the context for recognition: the occasion of gift-giving.

Ricoeur on Multiculturalism

Before he discusses gift-giving, however, Ricoeur discusses the complexity of mutual recognition in the context of modern political struggles under the heading of "Multicultural and the 'Politics of Recognition.'"[133] While Ricoeur speaks broadly of "multiculturalism," he also explicitly mentions feminist movements and racial and cultural minorities as being part of this broad movement of claims for recognition. At the same time, because he is a French philosopher originally speaking to a French audience, he must specify the context for the struggle of multiculturalism. He writes that he reserves the term "multiculturalism for claims for equal respect coming from different cultures that in fact have developed within one and the same institutional setting."[134] That is, he acknowledges the great diversity of different groups fighting for recognition on a global scale, and he aims to focus his discussion on the limited sphere of different

---

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 212.

[134] Ibid., 212–213.

cultural groups within the same institutional setting. Riceour summarizes the root of these claims:

> The stake common to these disparate but often convergent struggles is the recognition of a distinct identity for culturally underprivileged minorities. Hence, it is a question of identity, but on a collective level and in a temporal dimension that embraces discrimination against these groups in a past that may date back a few centuries, as in the case of the history of slavery, or even many centuries, as in the case of the status of women. The demand for equality on the social plane involves self-esteem…and ultimately the political structure itself.[135]

Ricoeur presents the various groups making claims for recognition as sharing in common a demand for recognition of a particular identity of a group that has been discriminated against not only now but over centuries. This identity is a collective identity, grouping persons together across history by this particular identity that has served as the basis for their discrimination. It is the reclaiming of respect for such identities that persons within these groups demand recognition and work for their own self-esteem, while also challenging the very nature of the political structure that has supported and maintained such discrimination. In summarizing Taylor's analysis, Ricoeur writes: "…the harm in question affects the image that members of the affected groups form of themselves, an image they perceive to be scornful, disdainful, even debasing. The seriousness of the lack of recognition…comes from the internalizing of this image in the form of self-depreciation."[136]

Ricoeur acknowledges the need for such struggles for recognition, though he ultimately argues for a different basis for understanding the work of recognition: that of

---

[135] Ibid., 213.

[136] Ibid., 213–214.

states of peace as opposed to struggle. At the same time, he does not believe states of

peace will be sufficient for redressing the concerns of groups discriminated against:

> Experiences of peaceful recognition cannot take the place of a resolution for the
> perplexities raised by the very concept of a struggle, still less of a resolution of the
> conflicts in question. The certitude that accompanies states of peace offers instead
> a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not
> illusory. This is why we have to turn to days of truce, clear days, what we might
> call clearings, where the meaning of action emerges from the fog of doubt bearing
> the mark of 'fitting action.'[137]

It is this desire to understand the moral motivation behind recognition that leads Ricoeur

into an alternative conception for the basis of mutual recognition. Ricoeur acknowledges

the necessity of struggling for recognition. At the same time, Ricoeur suggests that basing

recognition on struggle alone can lead to an interminable dynamic, and one reason this is

so is because what it means to "be recognized" remains mysterious. There is no indicator

for when a person or group will feel truly recognized. Rather than base recognition on

struggle, then, Ricoeur argues that we need an alternative vision that expresses the

experience of mutual recognition that occurs during states of peace, when the need to

struggle is momentarily postponed. Again, such an alternative does not replace the need

for struggle. Indeed, struggle is necessary, especially on behalf of those who experience

the suffering of the denial of recognition first hand. I will argue in the next chapter that

this alternative to struggle serves most effectively as a hermeneutic for those in positions

of power, that is, those for whom the dissymmetry in mutual recognition bears the greater

societal advantage in being more readily recognized and valued than others. In the next

---

[137] Ibid., 218.

chapter, we will discuss more closely the implications of this dissymmetry for persons classified as white in a society divided by race.

Ricouer on Recognition in States of Peace: the Gift Exchange

Ricoeur begins to explain his concept of "states of peace" as an alternative to seeing mutual recognition only in terms of struggle. His thesis is that:

> The alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange. The exceptional character of these experiences, far from disqualifying them, underscores their importance, and precisely in this way ensures their power to reach and affect the very heart of transactions stamped with the seal of struggle.[138]

The peaceful symbolic mediation he sees as the most fitting for mutual recognition is that of the paradox of gift-giving.[139] When persons exchange gifts, a paradox occurs of a reciprocal giving that is not based on obligation or equivalence, justice or commerce. The gift exchange falls outside the realm of justice, since the exchange of true gifts cannot be mandated or regulated by justice without compromising the motivational generosity that drives the exchange of gifts. Justice is "governed by the rule of equivalence," as opposed to the love that motivates gift-giving, a love characterized by "superabundance."[140] While in justice, a person may be obligated to give something to another out of compensation or punishment, the superabundance of love flows knows no obligation except its own

---

[138] Ibid., 219.

[139] Ibid., 225.

[140] Ibid., 251; Ricoeur spells out this love vs. justice comparison in religious terms in his chapter "The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God," in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 279–283.

impulse to give and to love. So too does gift giving fall outside the realm of commercial

exchanges, since again, if one were to receive a gift one had paid for or otherwise

exchanged something of value in order to get, then this no longer qualifies as a "gift."[141]

The nature of the gift is to give without concern for a gift given in return, motivated by

love and the desire to give.[142]

The love motivating the gift exchange is an overflowing of the heart known as

"agape" that knows nothing of comparisons or equivalents, inscribing the relationship to

the other in an active expression of care for the other. This active expression of love as

agape does not argue, but rather "speaks" through parables and examples.[143] Ricoeur

describes the language of agape as praise, hymn, the optative mode of the beatitudes,

"Blessed are they…" The movement agape makes towards justice is that of the

imperative of love: "you shall love," or like a lover to the beloved: "Love me!,"

commending itself to the beloved through tenderness or supplication. Ricoeur depicts the

language of this agape love as poetry, contrasted with the language of justice as prose.

While love is focused on praise, justice is concerned with equivalence in the settling of

disputes and judgment. Here Ricoeur brings together these two realms with a depiction of

---

[141] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 235–237. Ricoeur here notes that "the spirit of the gift provokes a rupture within the category of [commercial] goods." It is here that I think Ricoeur contributes to the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth concerning the economic implications of recognition. While Fraser insists on an economic analysis of redistribution in tandem with but distinct from cultural recognition, I think Ricoeur highlights a unique element in the recognition of certain "gifts" that are beyond material or economic value. Appreciating the symbolic gifts of one another does have economic implications, but it cannot be limited to economic analysis. See Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[142] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 223; drawing from the work of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[143] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 222.

the gift exchange as a bridge connecting love and justice through this paradoxical example of giving and reciprocity. A gift is given out of love, and another gift is given in return out of a new first generosity.

Yet at each step of the gift exchange, there is risk. The exchange begins with a moment of risk in which one person offers to another a gift out of the desire to give, risking that the gift will be rejected. There is also risk that the recipient will feel a sense of obligation, a sense of duty to return the generosity of the first giver with a gift of like-kind, but this sense of duty or obligation detracts from the generosity of the initial gift. How can the first gift be generous if there is the expectation of an obligatory gift-given in return? The initial risk is overcome when the recipient receives the gift with gratitude. Then, it is not out of obligation, but out of gratitude and again the desire to give, that the receiver in turn becomes the giver, returning to the original giver a gift, eliciting perhaps another moment of gratitude. Yet the risky nature of the gift exchange remains. In any offering of a gift, there is never any guarantee that the gift will be given or received well. There is always the possibility of misunderstanding or even manipulation. Thus, this gift exchange is one that expresses the fragility of generosity and gratitude, the discrete moments of risk leading one to move from gratitude to a new original generosity.

It is in this way, with the language of the gift exchange, that Ricoeur describes mutual recognition. Recognition of the other is not won at the expense of an obligation or duty, but rather, each one recognizes the other as someone who is offering a gift, in which each one receives the gift of the other in gratitude, and without expectation that the other will respond in like kind. In this model, the basis is not judgment, shame or guilt, but rather the recognition of the gift of the other, and a sense of overwhelming gratitude

accompanied by the desire to give. It is this concept of gratitude that grounds mutual

recognition in a "state of peace" rather than struggle.

Ricoeur connects this conception of mutual recognition with the two earlier forms

of recognition, recognition as identification and self-recognition. The recognition-

attestation of identifying something is present in the recognition of the gift being offered,

and the gift exchange highlights the role of self-recognition in the recognition of one's

capacity to be generous, of having gifts to give. The active form of "to recognize" moves

towards the passive form "being recognized" in this process of gift giving.[144] In

summary: "the course of identity [recognition] with its gaps and divergent meanings, its

reprise of the logical sense of identification in its existential sense, and its recapitulation

in being-recognized, thanks to the experiences of struggle for recognition and that of

states of peace."[145]

At the same time, "identity" as in sameness is also contrasted throughout with

alterity or difference. Identifying something as the same as itself, recognizing one's own

identity existentially, and having one's identity reaffirmed in the process of mutual

recognition, evokes at each step the other. Ricoeur emphasizes the alterity and asymmetry

present in mutual recognition, particularly in the moment of reception in the gift

exchange and the experience of gratitude. "In receiving, the place of gratitude, the

dissymmetry between the giver and the receiver is affirmed twice over: other is the one

who gives and the one who receives; other is the one who receives and the one who gives

in return."[146] This acknowledgment of asymmetry points to the importance of

---

[144] Ibid., 250.

[145] Ibid.

recognizing difference and distance even in the moment of love and gratitude. Ricoeur writes of this difference as:

> An asymmetry that would like to forget itself in the happiness of 'each other.' Even in the festivity of an exchange of gifts, the other remains inaccessible in his or her alterity as such. Misrecognized or recognized, the other remains unknown in terms of an originary apprehension of the mineness of selfhood. This misrecognition is not that of misrecognizing someone, but rather that of misrecognizing the asymmetry in the relation between me and the other.[147]

A distance between the one and the other in the experience of the gift exchange remains intact whether or not it is recognized. In fact, Ricoeur declares, "Alterity is at its peak in mutuality."[148] That is, the difference of the other and distance between the two is made most profound in the moment of mutual recognition. Yet as in every other aspect of the gift exchange, this recognition of the asymmetry is at risk of being forgotten. Acknowledging this risk takes us a step closer towards a deeper gratitude and the profundity of the exchange of gifts among persons in a dissymmetrical relationship:

> Admitting the threat that lies in forgetting this dissymmetry first calls attention to the irreplaceable character of each of the partners in the exchange. The one is not the other. We exchange gifts, but not places. The second benefit of this admission is that it protects mutuality against the pitfalls of a fusional union…A just distance is maintained at the heart of mutuality, a just distance that integrates respect into intimacy.[149]

The risk involved at every step of the process of the gift exchange highlights its fragility, its inability to be offered up as an "easy answer" to the struggles for recognition so

---

[146] Ibid., 263.

[147] Ibid., 260.

[148] Ibid., 251.

[149] Ibid., 263.

prevalent throughout the world. Yet it remains as a model of something miraculous, a moment of grace when two persons come together and offer gifts to one another, out of a superabundance of love and out of gratitude for the gifts the other brings.

Conclusions from Ricoeur on Mutual Recognition

In his discussion of the philosophical use of "recognition" in political theory, Ricoeur has described the work of Hobbes, Hegel, and Honneth as all developing a social theory based on conflict and struggle. Ricoeur sees Hegel's concept in his Jena writings of the struggle for recognition as a response to Hobbes' "struggle to the death." Hegel improves upon Hobbes' theory by emphasizing the interpersonal nature of human beings as needing the recognition of others, thus rooting conflict over recognition in a moral impulse to be recognized by significant others. Ricoeur looks at Honneth's more recent adaptation of Hegel's work to show the political ramifications of recognition in the forms of love, rights, and solidarity, as well as the negative ramifications of the withholding of recognition in the forms of abuse, disenfranchisement, and cultural devaluation.

Ricoeur's final analysis of recognition in the context of the gift-exchange connected the mysterious grace-filled nature of gifts to the conversation surrounding the demands of justice. The analysis of the gift exchange as a model for mutual recognition cannot be offered as a universal model; indeed, because of the ongoing struggle of oppressed persons we cannot insist that they be filled with gratitude. This in itself is a hypocritical portrayal of the gift exchange and not an authentic representation of the real moments of generosity and gratitude in the exchange of gifts. Rather, this model is particularly helpful for persons who are prone to fear the demands for recognition by

oppressed groups. It is precisely those with power and privilege, those who are most at risk of misrecognizing these others, that can benefit from seeing recognition in terms of a gift exchange. In the following chapter, I will draw together the questions interjected throughout the commentary on Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* to make more explicit the way persons classified as "white" in a racist society employ "recognition" as a hermeneutic for understanding the ongoing problem of racism, recognizing themselves amidst such a society, and moving towards others in mutual recognition modeled after the exchange of gifts.

Chapter 6: The Hermeneutics of Recognition

"There are preachers and congregations committed to resist white racism and white supremacy. The pictures of white racism I describe and the concerns and issues that I raise about our theological agenda are an attempt to confront myself and the white Christian communities of which I am a part with the ever-present violence of white racism and white supremacy. Part of my aim, then, is to encourage and aid preachers and working theologians to develop a collective response to white supremacy and racism."[1]

This dissertation began by noting the absence of preaching on racism in white congregations, based on a sample study of fifty white churches from across the country from a variety of denominations, looking at the Sunday before Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 2013, the year which marked the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the fiftieth anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" speech delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Equality, and the inauguration of President Barack Obama to his second term in office, the first African American to hold such a position. If not this particular Sunday, when might a white preacher talk about issues of race in a predominantly white congregation? While there may be multiple and complex reasons why white preachers have remained silent on racism, I have argued in this dissertation that white preachers need a revised hermeneutic in order to overcome their reticence to preach on race in white congregations. I suggested the changing nature of racism today, the difficulty of interpreting the salience of white racial identity, and a lack of theological vocabulary for appropriately identifying racism as sin, have all contributed to this reticence.

---

[1] Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 111.

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the *Course of Recognition* by Paul Ricoeur, in which recognition is described in semantic analysis and philosophical genealogy. After introducing recognition lexicographically, Ricoeur identifies an internal pattern in the philosophical concepts of "recognition." Ricoeur points out how the word "recognition" has taken on new forms and new meanings that perhaps have been suggested or hinted at in the previous philosophical context. The three main movements he names are "Recognition-Identification," "Recognizing Oneself," and "Mutual Recognition." This process of recognition moves from individuals' recognition of something in particular, to recognizing themselves, and to recognizing their dependence upon others for recognition and mutual recognition. In each of these movements, Ricoeur shows how the understanding of "recognition" in this philosophical context necessarily leads to the next context, and so on. That is, recognition as identification leads to the recognition of oneself, and recognizing oneself points to the act of mutual recognition as seen in an experience of gratitude. At the same time, the moment of mutual recognition entails and points back to recognition-identification and self-recognition. Each of these hermeneutical moments connect to aspects in the other moments.

The final part of the process of recognition was depicted in the image of the gift exchange, contrasting this state of peace to the image of struggle used most prevalently in political theories of mutual recognition such as that of Axel Honneth. This process or movement of recognition serves as a symbol for the hermeneutic journey of white preachers moving towards a better understanding of racism, themselves as white, and others in the context of mutual recognition. This chapter describes this hermeneutic journey as a resource for white preachers seeking to preach about racism in white

congregations. The first part of this chapter will correlate Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* with the issues of interpretation described in earlier chapters. The final part of this chapter will describe how I have utilized this hermeneutic, giving an example of a re-written sermon preached following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an example that demonstrates the way such a hermeneutic might lead to the creation of sermons on racism.

The Course of Recognition **and the Hermeneutics of Recognizing Racism**

While the structure of this dissertation has seemed to make distinct three sources of reticence, these three sources of reticence are seen in a hermeneutics of recognition as part of a single process of struggle and hesitation overcome into a process of transformation and eventual gratitude. Ricoeur's lexical analysis of recognition presents the hermeneutic of recognition as a symbolic course, a movement that at once is segmented but also unified. The meaning of recognition encompasses all of these definitions, just as the hermeneutic of recognition involves all of these possibilities in its course. The balance of understanding between "homonymy and univocity" makes recognition a rich concept for exploring its use as an image for the process of white preachers taking up the task of preaching on racism. The struggle to understand racism as it exists today in new forms and with new meanings attached to it, moves whites into a struggle to understand themselves as racialized within a society that views them as "white," and also moves white preachers into an awareness of how their efforts to address such racism will fall short, that they will sin in the midst of their sin-talk concerning racism. This three-part movement, in which each moment is hinted at and hidden within

the other two moments, is what I call the hermeneutics of recognition. The basis for understanding this process of recognition is a prior context of Christian faith that believes in a God who redeems humanity, lovingly giving to humanity the gift of new life. This grounding roots recognition in gratitude, in the thankful awareness of our need for God and for redemption. Below, I will examine the hermeneutic of recognition as it is drawn together from Riceour's *Course of Recognition* and the analysis of race, racial identity, and theological expressions of racism as sin.

Speech Acts and Semantics: Beginning the Process of Recognition-Identification

Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* begins with lexical analysis: looking at words. While this methodology of a dictionary discussion may seem rudimentary, it makes a claim for the importance of words and their meanings. What words mean and which words are spoken influence the ways persons think and act.[2] The field of linguistic anthropology explores the subtleties of speech, and how words themselves perform acts.[3] In Ricoeur's phenomenology of the capable human being, the capacity to speak is listed first, prior to the capacity to act, because action is already possible within speech itself. Speech can do things.[4]

---

[2] See for example, the influential work describing the impact of metaphors such as "time is money" in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003).

[3] For one of the earliest and most influential works in linguistics, see the discussion of "speech acts" in J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University 1955* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[4] The famous example of this is the wedding, in which saying the words "I do" actually does something, committing persons to one another in marriage. See ibid.

A basic premise of this dissertation has been that to speak of race or racism in sermons is preferable to not speaking of race or racism at all. This step, naming race or racism, is already a challenge to the color-blind ideology that has assumed ending racism means not talking about race.[5] To speak of "race" or "racism" is already to act, to step outside the color-blind ideology, and to challenge color-blindness as an adequate solution. To name race in the presence of others, to speak of "racism" as something that continues in the present and is not only a thing of the past, is already to act in the present.

Recalling the first set of definitions Ricoeur explores in the *Littré*, recognition involves the action of bringing "to mind again the idea of someone or something that one knows."[6] To say "race" or "racism" is to initiate a process of recognition. Speaking the words "race" or "racism" brings an idea to one's mind, but the "who" or "what" that is being recognized in this word remains unsaid and unspecified. To speak the word "race" already conjures up a tension, an unspoken source of conflict, naming a category that as a social construct has led to terrible social strife.[7] The process of recognition begins with naming "race," and to speak of "racism" is already to bring to mind a subject with different interpretive consequences. Speaking of race acts by bringing to mind the subject of racism.

As Ricoeur points out in the lexical definitions of recognition, what follows this first definition of "bringing to mind" is the "marks or signs" of the recognized idea,

---

[5] For a discussion of color-blind ideology, refer to Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

[6] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 6.

[7] I follow the premise that "race" is a social construct invented to justify social stratification and domination such as the institution of slavery. See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2nd ed.. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

though what remains unsaid is the reliability of the sign or the mark. The "marks" of recognition in the case of racism are also unspoken in the initial utterance of the word "racism." In the first and second chapters, I discussed how whites have very different ideas of what racism means, and that differences in interpretation lead persons to differ in determining criteria for what "counts" as racist. Speaking the word "racism" alone, without including explanation for the marks or signs for how one recognizes racism, will lead to differences in interpretation. Preachers cannot use the word racism and expect listeners to accept the same meaning as they intend, and so the way a preacher uses the word must be explained before the listeners can accept as true the concept of racism as depicted and intended by the preacher.

In the lexical definitions Ricoeur examined, the meaning that followed bringing an object to mind and the signs and markers of what is brought to mind, was the definition of catching sight of or realizing as true. In the context of preaching about racism, this might resemble either the preacher gaining a more complex picture of racism through readings on the subject in sermon preparation, or members of the congregation understanding what is meant or intended by the preacher, though in both cases this understanding has occurred after a hesitation, delay or resistance. The gap between understandings of what is meant by "racism" must be both acknowledged and overcome.

In Ricoeur's description of the philosophical form of recognition as identification, the threat of error always looms behind the Cartesian true/false distinction, which means that distinguishing the "truth" of racism from other definitions is never easy but rather includes the risk of mis-identification, error, or suspicion. In the process of identification, recognizing something as itself and not something else takes on a form of "attestation" or

fragile belief, a form of belief that is similar to testimony. The process of recognition-identification is akin to testimony in that it may not be universally accepted to be true. The recognition-identification one makes must be made on a personal and individual level.

For the white preacher preaching about racism, this fragility within the hermeneutic of recognition is echoed in the tentative and tenuous identification of what racism means today. It is not simply the case that declaring to the congregation that "such-and-such is an example of racism" will be clearly evident to the listeners, especially in all-white congregations. The identification process of the preacher emerges out of the fragility of naming that can be challenged and will be challenged by others. Part of the testimonial character of identification comes in the act of explanation on the part of the preacher in how one came to see this or that as racism.

This difficulty of naming racism in this process of recognition-identification arises not only out of ignorance or denial, but rather the word "racism" as a concept has itself changed over time. As discussed in the second chapter, Omi and Winant's work has shown how the concepts of race and racism have evolved in history and continue to be politically contested.[8] While racism of the past was marked by legalized segregation and intentional discrimination, the contours of racism at work in society today elude such clear descriptors. To speak of racism as a racialized social structure that continues to benefit some to the detriment of others, does not give an easily-identifiable set of criteria for recognizing racism within everyday interactions. Bonilla-Silva's work on "color-blind" racism discusses the way race functions today in subtle code words and with the

---

[8] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

avoidance of direct racial speech.[9] Awareness of the "color-blind" manifestations of racism helps the preacher be prepared for the difficulty in "seeing" and recognizing racism amidst persons living in a culture taught to be blind to race. Additionally, the understanding of what constitutes race and racism has changed over time, and so "recognizing" racism is a complicated interpretive task due to the shifting meanings of racism. Bonilla-Silva's framework of a "color-blind" racial social structure accounts for racial inequality through processes of racialization that are "(1) increasingly covert, (2) embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) void of direct racial terminology, and (4) invisible to most whites."[10] Descriptors such as "covert," "embedded," "void," and "invisible" point to the inherent difficulty of seeing and apprehending racism at work in the world.

Awareness of the "color-blind" manifestations of racism acknowledges the difficulty in "seeing" and recognizing racism amidst persons living in a culture taught to be blind to race. "Recognizing" racism is therefore a complicated interpretive task due to the shifting meanings of racism.[11] Thus, as several race theorists have pointed out, part of the problem of ongoing racism is the mis-recognition of what counts as "racism." These theorists have sought to expand previous understandings of racism as limited to intentional acts of discrimination based on race, to include in such a definition an analysis of history, institutions, systems, power, privilege, and microaggressions, showing that

---

[9] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

[10] Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 48.

[11] Ibid., 21–36.

racism remains a problem disadvantaging people of color, and benefiting whites, despite claims by whites of "reverse discrimination."[12]

Understanding this from a hermeneutic of recognition, this process is riddled with risk and error, the risk that one's testimony will not be accepted, or perhaps that one has mis-identified what one has recognized. A hermeneutic of recognition involves identifying the realities of ongoing racism through attestation and testimony, despite the objections of others who interject doubt and suspicion. White preachers, through a hermeneutic of recognition, testify to what one believes to be current examples of racism.

Among the lexical definitions of recognition included "accepting as true," as well "submitting to the authority of another." In the context of preaching, the process of congregants accepting something as true involves the authority of the preacher, and the authority of what sources the preachers uses to talk about racism. The definition of recognition as submitting to the authority of some person depicts this authorial role. Yet again, the authority of the preacher and or the sources the preacher employs could be resisted and rejected. Ricoeur reminds us that in the movement of recognition: "Denial is not far off."[13] The definitions of recognition then move towards a declaration of faith, a confession, an avowal of a debt or error. For whites to understand the resilience of racism in perpetuating inequality, something like a declaration of faith takes place, a renouncing of previously-held beliefs in the basic fairness of society. Such recognition leads to the

---

[12] See the most recent ruling on such a case in *Fisher v. Texas* in which the Supreme Court upheld the right of university admissions officers to consider race as one factor among many in admitting students in order to work towards a diverse student body.

[13] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 7.

confession of complicity in racist structures, an awareness of how many whites continue to benefit from a racialized social structure.

This form of recognition as avowal resembles the naming of racism as sin that took place in chapter four. Naming racism as sin, as idolatry, involves making a sort of declaration of faith, acknowledging that society is structured in such a way as to guarantee unfairness for some. For white preachers, the theological task within process of recognition-as-identification is the naming of sin as idolatry. As discussed in chapter four with the work of George Kelsey, J. Kameron Carter, and M. Shawn Copeland, interpreting racism as idolatry involves analyzing how even theology has been interpreted through racialized social structures. Naming racism as idolatry challenges the assumption that racism is merely a matter of personal prejudices or ignorance that can be addressed through education. Rather, the sin of idolatry is something that impacts a person's worldview and requires a reorientation of one's spiritual attention. In making this declaration, that racism is an idolatry, a form of estrangement that separates whites from others, a bondage which limits even their best intentions from success, whites are making a confession, as this declaration implicates them as beneficiaries in this unjust system. Unearned advantages are acknowledged, and one's contribution to a racist society is confessed. Such acknowledgment and confession are both forms of recognition that move from identification to personalization. But such recognition goes another step, in which the definition of recognition makes the unexpected turn towards gratitude. Recognition turns to gratitude when persons feel themselves forgiven, their debts released. White preachers recognizing themselves as forgiven by God in Christ are released from the shame and guilt of their complicity, moved by gratitude to impact society and to call for

greater racial equity. Even in the earliest moments within the hermeneutics of recognition, the process of recognition-identification points to and connects with self-recognition and mutual recognition.

Self-Recognition as Personalization of What Has Been Recognized

The second philosophical form of recognition Ricoeur presents is that of self-recognition. Ricoeur looks at the use of recognition in the study of memory and its impact on self-understanding, including the enigma of traces, or forgotten memories, either willfully forgotten or unavoidably forgotten. What we recognize as "our" memories relate us to a concept of our "self" as persons with particular histories. Ricoeur also discusses self-recognition as the process by which we acknowledge responsibility for our actions. This involves recognizing one's own capacities to act in the world, to speak, to narrate oneself, and the ability to impute guilt to oneself for one's actions in the world.

In applying this to a hermeneutic of recognition for preaching to whites on racism, the movement of recognition towards "self-recognition" involves a personalization of what has been recognized, recognizing oneself in the system of racism. The identification of the ongoing problem of racism impacts whites' self-perceptions, especially since many current theories of racism indict all whites benefitting from racism, thus leaving no whites who are "innocent." This step of self-recognition involves not just noticing racism out there, but experiencing the internal struggle of considering one's own whiteness. This includes expanding one's sense of collective memory to include not just the memories of one's own family and neighborhood, but the histories and memories of those segregated away from our neighborhoods and denied equal treatment in society. Such

personalization involves recalling events from one's childhood that had an impact on one's current views of race, trying to understand oneself through these memories as someone socialized from childhood into a racialized society. It is in this process of self-recognition that whites come to see the problem of racism—seeing in their unconscious reactions to persons of color the reality that they have been socialized to react to in certain ways, despite their conscious image of themselves as not racist people. This self-recognition takes place also in the awareness that whites are embedded in a larger system of racism, benefiting from laws and institutions that perpetuate racial inequality.

This second step of self-recognition or personalization, resonates with the psychological research on white racial identity development, scholarship that examines the difficult process whites have in seeing themselves as white.[14] As described in chapter three, the work of Janet Helms and Beverly Daniel Tatum has provided a model of white racial identity development, a model useful for helping white preachers understand what possible psychological reactions they may incur when preaching about racism. Helms' model of white racial identity development offers a helpful way of understanding the different stages a white person may go through on the way to developing a positive white racial identity that is not based on illusions of superiority.[15] Tatum's experience in the classroom demonstrated that students who were aware of some of the predictable emotions and reactions to learning about racism, as described in the stages of racial development, were more likely to stay engaged with the process of talking about race

---

[14] My previous work has examined how introducing preachers to the concepts of white racial identity development can help them stay engaged in the process of talking about racism. Carolyn Browning Helsel, "'A Word to the Whites': Whites Preaching About Racism in White Congregations," *Word & World* 31, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 196–203.

[15] Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*.

instead of withdrawing.[16] These insights give white preachers an idea of the kinds of

reactions they might expect from their congregation or even themselves when talking

about race. Such reactions might include outward expressions of denial or resentment, or

more inward experiences of guilt or shame.

Also in chapter three, I examined the contributions of Hartigan, McDermott, and

Lindquist to an ethnographic approach to understanding white racial identity. These

theorists portrayed the complexity of white racial identity as it intersects with class.

These portrayals caution white preachers against making sweeping claims about whites

more generally, even while coming to acknowledge the salience of their own white racial

identity. Ricoeur's discussion of self-recognition in the Greek myth of Ulysses pointed to

how self-recognition could ultimately result in violence when one makes oneself known

to others in order to reassert one's dominance. The resonance of the risk of violence at

the end of such self-recognition cautions white preachers against dominating others in the

process of acknowledging their own whiteness. Because not all white persons benefit in

the same way from racism, and because many whites perceive discussions of white

privilege to be "adding insult to class injury,"[17] white preachers need to acknowledge that

other whites have different horizons from which they view the world. Taking this

hermeneutic approach allows white preachers to see how other whites see the world

differently due to their individual experiences and class situation, as well as other

intersectionalities of oppression. Whiteness is a hermeneutic positionality that hinders

whites' ability to see the experiences of racial oppression from the perspective of persons

---

[16] Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom."

[17] Bounds, "Gaps and Flashpoints."

of color, and that particular positionality also depends upon other factors related to one's social location. By approaching white racial identity through hermeneutics, white preachers can accept the variety of interpretations individual whites give to their "whiteness." Bringing the psychological model of white racial identity development to bear on the hermeneutic method also gives the white preacher a vision for what the hoped-for aim is in discussing whiteness: not to perpetually induce guilt, but to help other whites develop a sense of themselves as white persons who have the potential to act against racism within their spheres of influence. The psychological model of Helms and Carter lifted up a "positive" white racial identity as not only possible, but desirable.

For white preachers, however, the movement to a positive view of oneself as white comes not from psychological assessment or even one's hopes of becoming a "good" white person. The movement to a positive view of oneself for white preachers involves a movement of grace. The "positive" view of humanity comes not from its evaluation of itself but from the God who has redeemed it. Here again, the theological analysis of racism as sin points to the need for redemption and provides the grounding for a positive view of white persons within an unjust racialized social system. In a footnote early in his book *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur cites a quote from Bernanos, reflecting the difficulty of truly loving oneself amidst one's capacity for sinfulness: "I shall not conceal the enchantment exerted on me by this passage from the end of Bernanos's Journal d'un cure de compagne: 'It is easier than one thinks to hate oneself. Grace means forgetting oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the grace of graces would be to love oneself humbly, as one would any of the suffering members of Jesus Christ.' "[18]

---

[18] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 24 footnote 31.

The difficulty of coming to a positive view of oneself as white within an unjust racialized social system, to "love oneself humbly," calls forth our theological analysis of the sin of racism in chapter four, naming sin as estrangement, not only from others but also from oneself and from God. The level of shame experienced by many whites upon discussing racism indicates the impact of racism on whites' self-understanding, whether or not they are conscious of having been socialized into a racist system. This shame impacts how one relates to and feels about oneself, and whether someone is able to feel a positive sense of self-esteem as a beloved child of God. Calling the sin of racism as estrangement helps white preachers draw the connections between the supposedly external harm and the hidden internal harm caused by racism on whites' self-understanding.[19] Estrangement also names the impact of racism on whites' relationship with other whites and non-whites. The larger system of racial stratification has meant segregated living and working situations, preventing whites from benefitting from the rich diversity of relationships envisioned by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Beloved Community."[20] Estrangement from oneself and from one another has also meant estrangement from God, isolated from the love of God embodied in brothers and sisters of other skin colors. The white preacher allows this second step of the hermeneutic of recognition, personalization, to consider the negative impacts of racism on one's own and one's congregation's self-identity and the impact of the sin of racism as estrangement in individuals' personal and collective lives.

---

[19] See Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound* (Boston: Houghton, 1970).

[20] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos Or Community?* (Boston: Beacon, 1967).

Towards Mutual Recognition: Gratitude

The experience of becoming aware of personal sinfulness, as well as being able to turn to a God who redeems sinners from their sin, produces an opportunity for gratitude. It is this gratitude that then grounds and motivates the final element of this hermeneutic of recognition, that of mutual recognition. Ricoeur arrives at gratitude via his initial lexicographical analysis, in which gratitude comes as the "unexpected guest" at the end of the lexical definitions. He then applies the definition to his search for examples of mutual recognition not based on struggle. Rather than rooting mutual recognition in struggle as had previous philosophers based on Hegel's work, Ricoeur sought to find examples of mutual recognition in states of peace. While not discounting the reality of inequality in relationships involving such states of peace, Ricoeur's approach grounds the concept of recognition as it moves towards the other in a more positive vision of what mutual recognition might look like in its ideal form.

Ricoeur lifts up the gift exchange as a metaphor for understanding mutual recognition, drawing from the work of Marcel Mauss.[21] In an exchange of gifts, there is this moment of risk in which one person offers to another a gift out of the desire to give. Ricoeur emphasizes that the gift economy differs from the economy of justice, in which obligation and duty shape the exchange. Rather, in the gift exchange, obligation and duty distort generosity. The desire to give comes out of the spirit of agape, a form of love that gives out of the desire to give and express one's love, and perhaps to be loved in return. Ricoeur writes:

---

[21] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

> Biblical agape belongs to an economy of the gift, possessing a meta-ethical character, which makes me say that there is no such thing as a Christian morality…but a common morality…that biblical faith places in a new perspective, in which love is tied to the 'naming of God'.…If the dialectic of love and justice results from it, this in itself presupposes that each of the terms preserves its allegiance to the order to which it belongs.[22]

The gift exchange embodies this "biblical agape" which demonstrates the overabundant love of God. Such love is related to but not dependent upon justice. Justice must be pursued for the sake of justice, and love must be pursued for the sake of love. In the gift exchange, the love shared in generosity is not a function of justice; it operates in an entirely different framework. In the ideal moment of gift exchange, the motivation is simply to give out of an overflowing love. Gifts are exchanged, not out of reciprocity or obligation, but within a gesture of overabundance and delight. The recipient receives the unexpected gift with gratitude. Then, there is the possibility, but not the expectation, that the recipient turns to offer a gift to the giver. This second gift comes not out of obligation, but out of gratitude and again the desire to give in love, which transforms the receiver into a giver, an action which elicits perhaps yet another moment of gratitude and generosity.

In all of this, however, there is risk. There is never any guarantee that the gift will be given or received well. There is always the possibility of misunderstanding, of manipulation even. There is the risk that the recipient will feel a sense of obligation or duty to return the generosity of the first giver with a gift of like-kind, but this sense of duty or obligation detracts from the generosity of the initial gift. The giver gives hoping to please the receiver, not to make him or her indebted. Thus, this gift exchange is one

---

[22] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 25.

that expresses the fragility of generosity and gratitude, the separate moments that independently move from gratitude to a new original generosity.[23]

It is in this way, with the language of the gift exchange, that Ricoeur describes the ideal of the concept of mutual recognition. Recognition of the other is not rooted in a sense of obligation or duty, but rather, each one recognizes the other as someone who is offering a gift, in which each one receives the gift of the other in gratitude, and without expectation that the other will respond in like kind. In this model, there is no room for shame or obligation, only the recognition of the gift of the other, and a sense of overwhelming gratitude accompanied by the desire to give. Again, Ricoeur reminds us that each moment of gift exchange is riddled with risk, the possibility of things going badly. Mutual recognition shaped on the model of the gift exchange is always ever threatened by the risk of mis-recognition.

In applying this image of gratitude for the hermeneutic of recognition in preaching about racism, white preachers can consider gratitude as both the starting point and the end goal of what they want the congregation to experience from a sermon. Sermons express white preachers' gratitude for the previously unknown perspectives of others, whose struggle and courage have brought new insight to the church and to society. White preachers can help congregations consider their involvement in unjust systems, and together they can work to be agents of change, motivated not out of obligation but out of a deep gratitude that is rooted in the depths of the generosity of God. This hermeneutic movement seeks to motivate listeners out of the gratitude felt upon seeing the "other" as a gift from God.

---

[23] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 225–247.

Acknowledging the gift of God's grace is a central aspect to this third

hermeneutic step, especially when connecting this hermeneutic movement to the third

theological descriptor of racism as bondage. The intractable nature of racism means that

we are perpetually in bondage to a socialization and a history that makes every gesture,

even our attempts to offer gifts to one another, at risk for perpetuating the system of

racism. Naming the sin of racism as "bondage" cuts through our easy attempts to

eradicate it from our lives, identifying the utter inability we have on our own for

becoming "anti-racist." Thus, the mutual recognition that this third hermeneutic step

initiates is one rooted in the conviction that we are ever only in bondage to our sin, but

we have been given a gift of grace from God in Jesus Christ, a gift which calls forth our

gratitude and our desire to give. Thus, mutual recognition, in the context of the sin of

racism, expressed theologically as bondage to sin, is only ever a gift from God.

A moment of mutual recognition is seen as just that: a gift from God. Experiences

of congregants hearing sermons in ways that motivate them to work for justice are gifts

from God. A congregant gaining the courage to discuss the topic of racism in their lives

and in their church context is a gift from God. Moments of mutual recognition in which

whites and non-whites experience relationships of mutuality are gifts from God. The

possibility that whites and persons of color can work together to make this a more loving,

inclusive and just society is seen as a pure gift, given the sinfulness of white supremacy

that has marred our history together. And because it is a gift, we do not presume it to be

within our control. We recognize the risk and tenuous nature of mutuality, a mutuality

that always includes dissymmetry within the relationship, acknowledging the possibility

of misstep and misrecognition at every point. But in the process of the gift exchange,

such dissymmetry always shifts—for one is never only in the position of recipient or giver, but constantly moving between these two roles, effecting an ever-unstable dissymmetry.

Thus, a hermeneutic of recognition does not guarantee that a white preacher will succeed in preaching a sermon on racism—indeed, the label "success" is insufficient for describing the outcome of an interpretive process. Neither does it ensure that whites can cease to perpetuate racism or participate in racist structures. Rather, it moves us forward in helping white preachers initiate a conversation among their congregations, beginning a process for working on our racism together, enabling us to move towards our brothers and sisters in a way full of gratitude and humility, aware of the fragility of our attempts to build relationships but grateful for the grace of God that leads us. A hermeneutic of recognition can help white preachers initiate a movement of discernment among their congregations. Providing white preachers with a "hermeneutic of recognition" of identification, personalization, and gratitude, facilitates the difficult work of interpreting Scripture and current events in light of the shifting nature of racism today and how such awareness impacts our self-understanding. These three movements of a hermeneutic of recognition can aid in preaching an effective anti-racist sermon for white congregations. A hermeneutic of recognition involves a three-step process that simultaneously interprets the social situation as well as the significance of the text for this particular moment. These three movements: identification, personalization, and mutual recognition through gratitude, as well as the mis-recognition looming as a risk at every step, can help root sermons on racism in a movement towards gratitude for sustaining congregations in the long journey towards greater racial justice.

Sermonic Application: Responding to the George Zimmerman Acquittal

On Sunday morning, July 14, 2013, I woke up preparing to preach as pulpit supply in a local congregation. A headlining news event changed how I would preach that morning. George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin, was declared "not-guilty," an acquittal that shocked and disappointed many who were convinced that racism caused Zimmerman to assume that Martin was suspicious. I was to preach a sermon on the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the lectionary text for that day. My manuscript had been prepared before I saw the news, and with less than two hours before the service, it was difficult to imagine preaching a different sermon.

Driving to the church, I reflected on Ricoeur's three-fold process of recognition. I went through the sermon in my mind with the news of the Zimmerman acquittal as I thought through the "identification-personalization-gratitude" movements of recognition. The first part of my sermon now became centered on the process of "identification," considering how the Good Samaritan text helped us to identify or recognize systemic injustice today. I decided that I wanted to draw parallels between the death of Trayvon Martin and the person who "fell into the hands of robbers" in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan. By identifying Martin with this character, I was able to compare different responses to his death to the responses of the characters in Jesus' story—the local police passing the man left for dead by supporting the actions of the "robbers" on the basis of stand-your-ground laws, and the media passing by, taking pictures of Zimmerman's injuries to argue the robber acted in "self-defense." I called it the "anti-Samaritan story"

because it was not a "Good Samaritan" who finally came to Martin, but the justice system—a trial by jury—which instead came to the "robber" and took pity on *him*, dressing Zimmerman's wounds and expressing concern for his safety, returning his gun to him and sending him on his way.

The second movement in the hermeneutic of recognition is personalization, so with this in mind I prepared the second movement in the sermon to involve the congregation reflecting on how this story related to their own lives. At this part of the sermon, I asked the congregation to consider how we are called to act as neighbors to those left by the side of the road. I referenced Martin Luther King Jr.'s analysis that the story does not call us just to charity, but to rebuilding the Jericho Road, meaning that we are to evaluate the systemic injustice and racial profiling that enabled this tragedy to take place. I then asked the congregation to consider themselves as the robber within the story, likening the robber not only to Zimmerman, but also to all of us who enabled this tragedy to occur. What have we condoned by allowing racial profiling and "stand your ground" laws that put people at risk along the Jericho Road? I asked us to consider ourselves as the robbers so that we might know it is not just this one person, Zimmerman, who we should see as "guilty" despite the court's ruling, but all of us who are implicated in a larger system that relies on the fear of black and brown bodies to justify racial profiling and police brutality against persons of color in order to keep whites "safe."

But I knew I could not stop with this movement, based on the three-fold hermeneutic of recognition. I had to find gratitude in this story. I had to interpret the text in such a way as to connect with my own expression of gratitude. In my preparation for the sermon, I had read a commentary on the text from Augustine of Hippo, a theologian

from the African continent, who viewed the story not as a moral tale about helping

others, but an allegory of the work of Christ in coming to save our sin-sick souls.

Augustine interpreted the Good Samaritan as the only one we could truly call "good,"

that is, God-in-the-flesh. This Good Samaritan stands in for Jesus who sees us by the side

of the road and who comes to us with healing balm of grace and new life. I connected this

interpretation of the text to the current situation by declaring that God in Christ has come

to heal the wounds we have inflicted on others, that it is God who comes to comfort the

mothers of black boys who fear letting their children go from their arms, and that it is

God who has gone before us who is already working to rebuild the Jericho road and heal

our souls sickened from racism. I proclaimed that Christ is working to bring about God's

kingdom, God's neighborhood, where all are safe, welcome and cared for. Following this

expression of gratitude for what God has done and is doing in Christ, I ended with Jesus'

words at the end of this text, in which he asks the lawyer "which of the three was a

neighbor to the man?," to which the lawyer responds "the one who showed him mercy."

At this, Jesus tells the lawyer "go and do likewise." Ending with this text does not return

to a works-based emphasis, but rather offers hearers an opportunity for expressing their

gratitude for God's grace in expressions of mercy for others. The call to "go and do

likewise" is not motivated out of obligation but comes out of the journey of having

recognized ourselves as implicated in the story, and yet forgiven by the grace of God in

Christ. To "go and do likewise" then becomes an opportunity to express our gratitude to

God and to one another.

The sermon I preached that morning, only a couple of hours after learning of the

Zimmerman acquittal, came as a result of having the hermeneutic of recognition as a

method for preaching on racism. With this method, I was able to respond to the immediate context of the George Zimmerman acquittal. I give this synopsis of my rapid re-crafting of a sermon based on the Good Samaritan to demonstrate that a three-fold hermeneutic of recognition for whites preaching on racism really "works." It "works" in the sense that it enables the white preacher to put current social events connected to the problem of racism in conversation with the Biblical text, providing a clear trajectory through which to move the sermon in order to effectively present the current problem of racism, whites' complicity in it, and present gratitude as the proper starting ground for our work in the world. My argument has not been that a hermeneutic of recognition "works" in the sense of actually diminishing the effects of racism today, but rather, that it can begin a conversation that needs to happen in white churches. This conversation cannot begin and end in one sermon alone. However, preaching about it can facilitate a conversation, and over time, can help congregants begin to see or "recognize" racism in a process of working towards an identity of anti-racism.

Conclusion

White preachers who do not already preach about issues of race and racism may not be persuaded by the argument thus far. The argument has not, however, meant to persuade. The argument is that a hermeneutic of recognition helps to bring together these seemingly disparate movements of recognition into a united framework with the goal of providing a tool for harnessing the illumination resulting from recognition. The hermeneutic itself is rooted in and motivated by gratitude. The hermeneutic of recognition is not the result of persuasion; it is the result of gratitude. Such gratitude comes through the experience of recognizing the continuing problem of racism and how one participates in its complicity, and yet how one is being called into a different way of seeing the world and has the capacity to re-narrate one's sense of history and work towards justice, and yet again how likely it is that one will continue to err in the process. Being recognized by God as someone who can work for justice, being recognized by God as a sinner forgiven and freed for acts of justice, inspires a depth of gratitude that fuels such work. White persons work for racial justice not because of shame, and not because of guilt, but out of a positive sense of gratitude for who they are and can be in light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. This love is the gift given by God, and true to the nature of the gift exchange, we have nothing comparable to give in return. Yet the desire to give arises within those who have received such a gift. The desire to give comes out of having been given a gift, and that desire to give is expressed symbolically in the promises and commitment of whites seeking to work against racial injustice.

Because this hermeneutic of recognition is already an end result and not a product of persuasion, the usefulness of this hermeneutic as a tool for preaching will be limited to those who already sense some need to think about race and racism. In the case of those white preachers who have sensed such a need, this hermeneutic will be useful in its description of how and to what end a process of self-reflection on race leads. To summarize: the hermeneutic of recognition serves not as a persuasive element of rhetoric for convincing others as to the salience of persistent racial inequality; it is itself a product and process of a self-reflexive journey leading an individual white preacher to engage more deeply with the problem of racism and to pursue a "course" chartered by others that leads to and out of an experience of gratitude. The hermeneutic of recognition helps describe this process, as well as provide a framework for how to construct sermons that represent a similar journey.

Future research trajectories following this project might include studying pedagogical processes that equip white preachers to use a hermeneutic of recognition in their sermon preparation. I am interested in how teachers of preaching can teach preaching in such a way as to provide space for the diversity of students present in homiletics courses to engage in the subject of race and racism. While this dissertation has looked at the intersection of race and class in discussing white racial identity, I am interested in pursuing how other intersections of oppression impact white racial identity formation. I have recently applied the hermeneutic of recognition as the hermeneutic of (mis)recognition to the subject of straight preachers preaching about homophobia in their congregations, drawing from the similarities of oppressions while also highlighting the

distinct differences.[1] I would like to enlarge the scope of my research to discuss issues of

gender and disability in addition to race and sexuality within a hermeneutics of

recognition. Additionally, I would like to re-write this dissertation for a more popular

audience, framing the hermeneutics of recognition as a method for preaching social

transformation.

---

[1] Carolyn Browning Helsel, "Queering 'Straight' Preaching: Mediating Between a Why and a How Through the Hermeneutic of (Mis)Recognition," *Theology and Sexuality*, Accepted for publication, forthcoming.

Appendix:

Martin Luther King (MLK) Sunday White Sermon Study

Denomination:	Total Sermons	Mention of MLK	Mention of Racism
Presbyterian	13	2	0
Episcopal	6	2	1
Methodist	6	1	0
Non-denominational	6	0	0
Baptist	5	1	0
Lutheran	4	1	0
United Church of Christ (UCC)	3	3	1
Church of Christ (other)	3	0	0
Catholic	2	0	0
Reformed	1	0	0
Church of God	1	0	0
Total	50	10	2
Sample by City Type:			
Urban	24	8	2
Suburban	20	2	0
Rural	6	0	0
Total	50	10	2
Sample by Geographical Region:			
Southern U.S.	20	3	1
Northeastern U.S.	11	3	0
Midwest U.S.	13	1	0
Western U.S.	3	1	1
Northwest U.S.	3	2	0
Total	50	10	2

Methodology

To gauge the absence of racism in the sermons of white preachers, I conducted a study sampling the sermons of fifty white preachers preaching in predominantly white congregations. The sermons sampled all came from websites of churches that put online the manuscripts and/or audio versions of the sermons preached by their ministers. In the case of sermons that I analyzed directly in the text, I used the manuscript as a base but altered it according to the audio version to display the sermon actually preached. In addition to the sermon samples from January 20, 2013, I also analyzed a wider selection of sermons from churches in one metropolitan area in the South. In this sample, I looked not only at the sermons preached on the Sunday preceding Martin Luther King Day but also at sermon series that focused on issues of justice. Churches were randomly selected based on the following criteria: that they have sermons posted online to be accessible to the general public, that they appear to be predominantly white from the demographics available on that church—many denominations offer demographic information on individual churches concerning race, so this information was reviewed where available— or from the photos taken of group events hosted by the congregation, and that they represented a variety of mainline denominations as well as non-denominational affiliations.

For instance, I would use a search engine to find sermons preached on the particular date January 20, 2013, using key words such as "sermon archive" and "sermon manuscript" to narrow my search to churches where such manuscripts were available online. Having found a church website that published its manuscripts online and which had a sermon manuscript from that particular date, I would look through the website

pages to see if the pictures introducing the preacher indicated that the preacher was white, and that from the pictures taken of church members and of church fellowship events tended to show a predominantly white congregation. In addition to searching with these key words, I also sought out churches from a variety of denominations. I chose churches mostly from mainline denominations because these have tended towards the more socially-progressive side of church politics, including the issue of the ordination of gay and lesbian persons. I theorized that such churches would be more likely to have a progressive stance towards interracial dialogue regarding racial inequality. When I noticed that I did not have many Lutheran churches represented, I would add the specific keyword "Lutheran" into my search, and so on. I also made sure to pick churches from a variety of locations around the country, including the major regions of the South, Northeast, Midwest, West, and Northwest. Most of the sampled churches come from the South, Northeast, and Midwest, as these areas of the country comprise the largest percentage of churches.[1] Additionally, among the various regions, I chose at random churches in urban, suburban, and rural areas, focusing mainly on urban and suburban churches due to the higher percentage of Christians living in urban and suburban areas. I would type in the address of the church on a map search engine so I could locate the church and its proximity to the nearest urban center to determine whether it should be considered urban, suburban, or rural.

Because of the diversity of churches in this sample, the make-up of the congregations also varied in terms of socio-economic status. A few of the churches are known for being wealthier congregations, but I did not seek out the largest churches or

---

[1] Based on information provided online by the Pew Research Religion and Public Life Forum, Religious Landscapes Survey.

the churches from the wealthiest parts of major cities, so that majority of the churches sampled represent a large proportion of middle-class and working-class whites. Due to the lack of demographics available for the wealth and income of individual congregants, it is undetermined how many of the congregants came from lower-class backgrounds or whose income fell below the poverty level. Future research might include expanding this sample to analyze the sermons of a larger cross section of white churches, looking for variables among congregations with overall majorities that represented class differences. The small sample of white congregations here represented a confirmation of my hypothesis that few white preachers preach about racism in their predominantly white congregations.

Bibliography

Adams, Maurianne, Warren J. Blumenfeld, Carmelita (Rosie) Castañeda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, and Ximena Zúñiga. *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2000.

Adelman, Larry. *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. DVD. San Francisco, Calif.: California Newsreel, 2003.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Reprint. New York: New Press, 2010.

Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1958.

Appiah, K. Anthony. "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction." In *Multiculturalism*, edited by Amy Gutmann, 149–164, 1994.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. 2nd ed. Indiapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999.

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University 1955*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Barndt, Joseph. *Becoming the Anti-Racist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Behrens, John T., and Wayne Rowe. "Measuring White Racial Identity: A Reply to Helms (1997)." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 44, no. 1 (n.d.): 17. Accessed January 19, 2014.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Translated by Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1988.

Berry, Wendell. *The Hidden Wound*. Boston: Houghton, 1970.

Blauner, Robert. *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Third Edition. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009.

———. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

Bounds, Elizabeth M. "Gaps and Flashpoints: Untangling Race and Class." In *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, edited by Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2004.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, 1999.

Bowser, Benjamin P, ed. *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1995.

Branscombe, Nyla R., Michael T. Schmitt, and Kristin Schiffhauer. "Racial Attitudes in Response to Thoughts of White Privilege." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2007): 203–215.

Brown, Sally A. "Hermeneutical Theory." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 112–122. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Campbell, Charles L. *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Carter, J. Kameron. *Race: A Theological Account*. New York: Oxford University Press US, 2008.

Carter, Robert T. *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model*. John Wiley and Sons, 1995.

Cheng, Patrick S. *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*. New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2013.

Chesler, Mark. "Contemporary Sociological Theories of Racism." In *Towards the Elimination of Racism*. New York: Pergamon, 1976.

Cone, James H. *Black Theology and Black Power*. New York: Seabury Press, 1969.

———. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011.

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women." *Standford Law Review* 43 (July 1991): 1241–1299.

Croll, Paul R. "Modeling Determinants of White Racial Identity: Results from a New National Survey." *Social Forces* 86, no. 2 (December 2007): 613–642.

Crowell. "Husserlian Phenomenology." In *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. 2nd ed.. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

———. , eds. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

DeYoung, Curtiss Paul, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim. *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Doane, Ashley W. "Rethinking Whiteness Studies." In *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, 1–18. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Dovidio, J.F., and S.L. Gaertner. "Affirmative Action, Unintentional Racial Biases, and Intergroup Relations." *Journal of Social Issues*, no. 52 (1996): 51–75.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1996.

Edwards, Korie L. "Much Ado About Nothing? Rethinking the Efficacy of Multiracial Churches for Racial Reconciliation." In *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith*, edited by J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, 231–254. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Emerson, Michael O, and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Feagin, Joe R. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York, London: Routledge, 2006.

Feagin, Joe R., and Hernan Vera. *White Racism: The Basics*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995.

Florence, Anna Carter. *Preaching as Testimony*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Harvester Press, 1980.

Frankenberg, Ruth, ed. *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

———. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Fraser, Nancy. *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*. Edited by Kevin Olson. Verso, 2008.

Fraser, Nancy, and Axel Honneth. *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. Translated by Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2003.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion." In *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, edited by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Noel Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Gualtieri, Sarah. "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (July 1, 2001): 29–58.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 222–237. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Hartigan, Jr., John. "Locating White Detroit." In *Displacing Whiteness*, edited by Ruth Frankenberg, 180–213. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

———. *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

———. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

———. "'White Devils' Talk Back: What Antiracists Can Learn from Whites in Detroit." In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.

Hassan, Salah. "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State." *Middle East Report* 32, no. 224 (Fall 2002).

Hayward, Mark D., and Melonie Heron. "Racial Inequality in Active Life among Adult Americans." *Demography* 36, no. 1 (February 1, 1999): 77–91.

Hegel, G. W. F. "Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit." In *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary*, translated by Leo Rauch. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983.

Helms, Janet E. "An Update of Helms's White and People of Color Racial Identity Models." In *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 181–198. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995.

———. *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1990.

Helsel, Carolyn Browning. "'A Word to the Whites': Whites Preaching About Racism in White Congregations." *Word & World* 31, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 196–203.

———. "Queering 'Straight' Preaching: Mediating Between a Why and a How Through the Hermeneutic of (Mis)Recognition." *Theology and Sexuality*, Accepted for publication, forthcoming.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. With selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668. Indiapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1994.

Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by Joel Anderson. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995.

Huber, Kevin R. "Thy Kingdom Come: Healing Racial Dysfunction in the Faith Community through Preaching and the Prophetic Imagination." D.Min., Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2008.

Hughey, Matthew W. "The (dis)similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of 'Hegemonic Whiteness.'" *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 33, no. 8 (September 2010): 1289–1309.

Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Ignatiev, Noel, and John Garvey, eds. *Race Traitor*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996.

Janoski, Steven Anthony. "Preaching for Conversion: Racism in the Small Church." D.Min., Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2003.

Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven, Connecticutt: Yale University Press, 2010.

Jones, James M. *Prejudice and Racism*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1972.

Jones, William R. *Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Kandaswamy, Priya. "Gendering Racial Formation." In *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Daniel HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Katz, Judy H. *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training*. 2nd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2003.

Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Kelsey, David. *Imagining Redemption*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Kelsey, David H. "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin?" *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 169–178.

Kelsey, George D. *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*. Charles Scribner's, 1965.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos Or Community?* Boston: Beacon, 1967.

Kovel, Joel. *White Racism: A Psychohistory*. New York: Pantheon, 1970.

Kyung, Chung Hyun. *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003.

Lee, Sharon M. "Racial Classifications in the US Census: 1890-1990." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 1993): 75–94.

Lerner, Steve. *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010.

Lindquist, Julie. *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002.

Lipsitz, George. *Possessive Investment In Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*. Revised and Expanded. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

Littré, Émile. *Dictionnaire de La Langue Française*. Vol. 4. Hachette et cie: Paris [etc.] :, 1873. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030080462.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 2 vols. New York: Dover, 1959.

Logan, John. *Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in Metropolitan America*. Providence, RI: Brown University, July 2011. http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report0727.pdf.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Massey, Douglas S, and Nancy A Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translated by Ian Cunnison. New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

McDermott, Monica. *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

McFadyen, Alistair I. *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

McFarland, Ian. "The Doctrine of Sin and the Fall." In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 140–159. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." In *Re-Visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture and Gender in Clinical Practice*, edited by Monica McGoldrick, 147–152. New York: Guilford Press, 1998.

McIntyre, Alice. *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Edited by Charles W. Morris. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1934.

Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Morton, Nelle. *The Journey Is Home*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1944.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

———. "Review of An American Dilemma by Gunnar Myrdal." *Christianity and Society* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1944): 42.

———. *The Godly and the Ungodly; Essays on the Religious and Secular Dimensions of Modern Life*. London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1958.

Norton, Michael I., and Samuel R. Sommers. "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing." *Perspectives on Pscyhological Science* 6, no. 3 (May 2011): 215–218.

Norton, Michael I., Samuel R. Sommers, Evan P. Apfelbaum, Natassia Pura, and Dan Ariely. "Color Blindness and Interracial Interaction: Playing the Political Correctness Game." *Psychological Science* 17, no. 11 (November 2006): 949–953.

O'Brien, Eileen, and Kathleen Odell Korgen. "It's the Message, Not the Messenger: The Declining Significance of Black-White Contact in a 'Colorblind' Society." *Sociological Inquiry* 77, no. 3 (August 2007): 356–382.

Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Oliver, Melvin L., and Thomas M. Shapiro. *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. New York, London: Routledge, 1997.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. "Conclusion: Racial Formation Rules: Continuity, Instability, and Change." In *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, 302–331. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

———. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Osmer, Richard Robert. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008.

Pape, Lance B. *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching*. Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2013.

Pinn, Anthony B. *Why, Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

Popielarz, Pamela, and J. Miller McPherson. "On the Edge or in Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships." *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1995): 678–721.

Prewitt, Kenneth. "Racial Classification in America: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Daedalus* 134, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 5–17.

Rasmussen, Birgit Brander, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray, eds. *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Ray, Jr., Stephen G. *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Resner, André. *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*. Chalice Press, 2003.

Rey, Alain, and Paul Robert. *Le grand Robert de la langue française*. Paris: Le Robert, 1985. http://gr.bvdep.com/version-1/gr.asp.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*. Translated by John Stephen Bowden. London; New York: Continuum, 2007.

———. *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1986.

———. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995.

———. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

———. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. *Reflections on the Just*. Translated by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

———. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Edited by Don Ihde. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

———. *The Course of Recognition*. Translated by David Pellauer. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005.

———. *The Just*. Translated by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

———. *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2003.

———. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Translated by Emerson Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

———. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Revised. New York, London: Verso, 1991.

Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960): 100–112.

Salaita, Steven. *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes From and What It Means for Politics*. Pluto Press, 2006.

Schoonmaker, Geoffrey Noel. "Preaching about Race: A Homiletic for Racial Reconciliation." Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, 2012.

———. "White Racism in Homiletic Textbooks: An Initial Glance." presented at the Academy of Homiletics, Chicago, Ill., November 16, 2012.

Sen, Amartya. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Smith, Beverly, and Barbara Smith. "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue." In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 113–127. 2nd ed. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.

Smith, Christine M. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

Stewart, Tracie L., Ioana M. Latu, Nyla R. Branscombe, Nia L. Phillips, and H. Ted Denney. "White Privilege Awareness and Efficacy to Reduce Racial Inequality Improve White Americans' Attitudes Toward African Americans." *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 1 (March 2012): 11–27.

Swidler, Ann. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: An Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom." *Harvard Educational Review* 62, no. 1 (1992): 1–24.

———. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Taylor, Charles, K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Edited by Amy Gutmann. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Taylor, Mark Lewis. *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*. Fortress Press, 2011.

Tesler, Michael, and David O. Sears. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Thompson, Becky. *A Promise and A Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Thompson, Becky, and Sangeeta Tyagi, eds. *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1996.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2004.

Walzer, Michael. *Spheres Of Justice: A Defense Of Pluralism And Equality*. Basic Books, 1984.

Ward, Jane. "White Normativity: The Cultural Dimensions of Whiteness in a Racially Diverse LGBT Organization." *Sociological Perspectives* 51, no. 3 (2008): 563–586.

Weems, Renita J. *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*. Edited by Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Western, Bruce, and Becky Pettit. "Black-White Wage Inequality, Employment Rates, and Incarceration." *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 2 (September 1, 2005): 553–578.

Whitmeyer, Joseph. "Why Actors Are Integral to Structural Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994): 153–165.

Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.

Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013.

Williams, Patricia J. *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*. New York: Noonday Press, 1998.

———. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Wogaman, J. Philip. *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Yancey, George. "An Examination of Effects of Residential and Church Integration upon Racial Attitudes of Whites." *Sociological Perspectives* 42, no. 2 (1999): 279–304.

———. "Racial Attitudes: Difference in Racial Attitudes of People Attending Multiracial and Uniracial Congregations." *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 12 (2001): 185–206.